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[FITTING HANDS.]

VERA'S VENTURE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"So Fair Her Face," &c., &c.

CHAPTER VII.

REMONSTRANCE.

He is a fool who thinks by force or skill
To turn the current of a woman's will.

"So that was the reason you would not marry Darcie," said Lady Rivers, after a few preliminary words of abuse. "That good-for-nothing, idle scamp. It is enough to make your father turn in his grave, Nellie Rivers."

"I don't think anything so dreadful as that will happen, Aunt Sarah," Nellie replied, demurely. "Papa liked Neville, and—"

"And he never thought you would be such a fool as to marry him," the irate lady said, "he is beneath you in every way."

"I do not see that."

"But all your friends will. You will bring yourself to ruin and disgrace all your friends if you persist in such a monstrous thing. I never heard of such madness; you would give Milverstone and all belonging to it to the son of a doctor. Have you no pride, that you can act like this?"

"You would have had me give it to the son of a lawyer, Aunt Sarah. I do not see much difference," Nellie said, drawing her little

figure up and facing her aunt without an atom of trepidation.

Sir Wilfrid had been a lawyer of no very special repute before he succeeded to the title, and Neville Delamere's social status had been till then far better than his.

"I would have had you keep it in the family. I would have had you give it—if you call it giving—to the head of the house. I would have had you behave with common decency, and not as—"

"Stop, aunt, if you please," Nellie said. "You have said quite enough. I have never behaved with anything but decency, and I am at liberty to marry whom I please—that it does not please you is no concern of mine. I will not discuss the subject with you any more. If my uncle has anything to say to me I am ready to hear it."

"He shall have something to say to you!" shrieked the irate lady. "He shall stop your degrading the family by such a foolish match. He shall prevent you receiving men in your boudoir, and—"

She never finished the sentence, for Nellie flung the door wide open and pointed to it.

"You have said enough," she said. "Go, if you please, I will listen to no more. This room is mine, and I choose it shall be private."

Lady Rivers was so astonished that she stared at her presumptuous niece and walked out of the room without another word.

Nellie shut the door after her and locked it, and then sat down and cried as if her heart would break.

It was a woman's way of getting rid of her

superfluous agitation, and it did her good, for while her aunt was on her way to Raybrook to proclaim Nellie's wickedness to the uncle and aunt of Neville Delamere, and boiling with excitement the while till she looked like a flustered cook, Miss Rivers had dried her tears and washed her face and was going about the house the same as ever, to the amazement of Millicent, who had expected hysterics and fainting fits and all the usual ceremonies that were gone through at home whenever it pleased her mother to indulge in one of her special fits of temper.

"What did mamma say to you?" she asked her cousin, at length, when her curiosity became unbearable. "Was she very angry?"

"She will tell you I daresay if she wishes you to know," Nellie said, quietly. "Whether she or anyone else is angry or pleased is no concern of mine, I am my own mistress."

"Of course," was all Miss Millicent could find to say.

There was no denying the fact, no one could stop her cousin marrying whom she chose nor get Neville Delamere away from her for anyone else.

Lady Rivers had to calm herself down considerably before she said anything to Mr. and Mrs. Blennerhasset, she could hardly denounce their nephew to them as a scoundrel, or talk about Nellie disgracing herself to them, but she felt that she must talk to them about it and find out at least what they knew concerning it.

She found, as she expected, that it was a surprise to them, at any rate to the gentleman.

Mrs. Blennerhasset guessed and approved in her heart, for she was very fond of her nephew,

and could not see his faults as her husband did.

The squire was troubled and gave his unqualified disapproval of the whole matter.

"It's not the match for Nellie to make," he said, and his few words unloosed Lady Rivers's tongue and prompted her to a display of temper which she had meant to keep under and which plainly showed the worthy squire and his wife her whole reasons for her objection to the match.

"She's a horrid vulgar woman," was Mrs. Blennerhasset's comment on her behaviour when she had gone back to Milverstone, and I don't wonder at Nellie not wanting to marry her son."

"I don't like her wanting to marry your nephew, Bessy," her husband said. "He is no fit husband for her."

"You are always hard on Neville, Rex; he is no worse than any other young man of the day, and as wife like Nellie, Rivers will keep him straight. Don't you make them unhappy by your objection. Neville has sown all his wild oats now and will settle down into a good husband if the match comes off."

"Which I sincerely hope it never will. I must talk to Nellie."

Which he did, but without any effect. She had not intended to say anything about it just yet, she said, but as the fact had come out she was not ashamed of it. She did love Neville very dearly and she was going to marry him. She was open to advice on any other subject, but on that particular one she would hear nothing. She was quite aware that he had been wild and reckless, but it was all over now, and he was a changed man. He had told her everything there was to tell of his past life, and had hidden nothing from her.

"Everything, my dear?" the squire said, looking at her rather incredulously. He could hardly believe that Nellie knew all there was to tell about her lover's career.

"Yes, everything. He has kept nothing from me."

"Then you must have had a tolerably long and very black list to listen to," he said, gravely. "Well, well, my child, I cannot say you may in the matter. I wish from my heart I could, for I am afraid that Neville will bring you much sorrow before you have done with him. I would a great deal rather have seen you fall in love with the young doctor down yonder. He's worth a dozen such lazy fellows as my wife's nephew."

"You would not have me marry a village doctor surely," Nellie said, with a half sigh. She had gained her point, but she was tired with the battle there had been about it.

"I would have you marry a man, my dear," Mr. Blennerhasset replied, "and Mr. Leicester is one. I can hardly give the name to the one you have chosen."

"Don't talk about him, please," Nellie said. "I won't hear him abused, it is the same as abusing me."

"Not yet, my dear," said the squire, laying his big fatherly hand on her head and stroking it. "I can only hope from my heart that he will be worthy of you, but I doubt it, child, I doubt it. He will break your heart as he has—"

He stopped himself just in time, for he felt sure that Nellie, though she fancied she knew all about Neville's former life, knew very little in reality. She did not notice his words, for her head was resting on his breast and her eyes were full of tears.

"He will be worthy of more than I can give him," she said, in her loving pride. "The time will come when you will know you have done him an injustice."

The squire ardently wished it might, but he said no more to her except to promise that he would see everything put in train for her marriage as far as the settlements were concerned, and he resolved in his own mind that Mr. Neville Delamere should have as little of the handling of his wife's money as could possibly be arranged.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON BOARD OF THE SAUCY SUSAN.

Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care,
Fashioned so slenderly,
Young and so fair.

THE Saucy Susan belied her name terribly as she lay at her mooring on the dark water with the pitiless rain beating down on her, and working the coal dust on her deck into a black slush, that grimed everything it touched to the colour of a sweep.

She was not a ship to be sung about in ballads and called a thing of beauty in sentimental paragraphs.

She was not even a penny steamer always in a hurry and ferment, and dirty by reason of the motley crowd that hurry on and off her decks with every passing hour.

She was nothing half so dignified even as a tug—she was only a coal barge and not half so smart and saucy as her companions.

She lay in the Surrey Canal, a dark and sluggish stream, waiting for the time to come when she was to take a perilous and adventurous journey—at least so it seemed to her commander and his wife—and go all across the river into the canal on the north side.

Black and rough as the Saucy Sally was, she was home to the people on board of her.

The coarse-looking woman with the battered face, who was cooking something redolent of onions in the stifling cabin, had never known any other dwelling place than barges, and the man who was smoking his pipe on deck under a tarpaulin shelter, regardless of the rain which was pouring down in torrents, had been born in just such a bed as he would occupy presently when they had had their supper and his wife had been able to clear away all the dishes and various odds and ends which were at present spread upon their nightly resting place.

It was a good enough life to them—they had to work hard and live hard, but they managed to get along somehow.

They were a thoroughly uneducated couple, a fact of which the lady was very proud—it gave her a standing, as it were, rather in advance of her neighbours on the barge, most of whom had deemed that ceremony totally unnecessary, and reared their numerous progeny in a comfortable and heathenish ignorance of all social and moral ties.

Mrs. Snadgett, for that was the lady's name, had a provoking habit of flourishing her "marriage lines" on every available occasion, and of asserting her own superiority in that respect in a manner that frequently led to serious differences of opinion between her and her lady acquaintances.

Life was not all honey to her, though she was Bill Snadgett's lawful wife.

He was very handy with his fists, and did not always scruple, as a well-regulated husband should have done, to use his heavy boots when he wanted to enforce an argument.

Mrs. Snadgett's face bore witness to the hastiness of his temper and the force of his arguments, and yet they were quoted as a fairly happy couple among the barge population of the canal.

"They were proud, were the Snadgetts," was the universal verdict on the water.

They were not satisfied to bring up their children like anyone else, which simply meant letting them live if they would or die if they must with most of the barge families.

The Snadgetts had tried to get their only girl out of the life, and they had done it, in so far as the girl succeeded in getting herself a situation as drudge in general to a woman who let lodgings of a low type, and who so starved and worked the half-grown creature that she fell ill and only came home to the barge to die in the stifling little den where she had first seen light.

It was a judgment on Polly Snadgett, the canal population declared, she should have let her girl do as other girls did—she would have picked up a husband sometime and been alive now very likely, and Molly would have had nothing to fret about.

Molly did fret. Undereath her rough outside, and it was about as rough as could be imagined in a woman, she had a world of love and tenderness. She loved her untutored husband and her lazy, foul-mouthed son just as passionately as the most refined wife and mother in the land, and worshiped the memory of her dead girl as if she were a veritable saint able to intercede in the other world for the mother who mourned her so deeply in this one.

A queer portrait or picture rather of the younger Molly hung above the flap that served for a table in the tiny cabin—a staring daub taken by some itinerant artist at a fair; and if every other inch of the place was dirty, as it very often was, for Molly was something of a slattern, and her means of cleanliness were small, the glass of the hideous libel on the human form divine was always bright and clean.

All was clean on this particular night on which we make the acquaintance of the Snadgetts, for they had had a short time of leisure, and she was going into a new neighbourhood and amongst fresh people, with whom, for aught she knew, cleanliness might be the fashion; she was anxious to appear at her best when she took this far-away journey across the river, if, indeed, they ever arrived on the other side safe and well—a matter on which she was very doubtful.

Her whole life so far had been bounded by canal banks, and she had but once passed right through London and over any of the bridges.

"There, it's all ready now," she said to herself as she raised her head from over the iron pot in which she had been cooking a strange muddle, which smelt appetising enough. "Now he may come as soon as he likes. Where's Dick? I wonder? But there it's no use worrying, he'll come when it suits him I suppose."

She sighed as she spoke, for Dick and his doings gave her a great deal of trouble.

He was hansom and his habits were the reverse of regular—in fact it was more by luck than good management, his father declared, that he had kept out of the clutches of the police till now.

His mother loved him, and made excuses for him as mothers will, and she put aside enough of the supper to have fed a family for him against he came in.

"Bill would eat it up and scrape the saucepan," she said, in apology as it were for her proceeding; "there's never any knowing when he'll end. Come on, old man, it's ready."

But Bill did not answer at once, and she climbed up the steep little ladder which was their only staircase to see what he was about.

"He'll have gone to sleep, I daresay," she said.

And sure enough he had—he had slipped down flat on the wet, sloppy deck and was slumbering peacefully with the pipe pushed far enough into his mouth to have choked any more sensitive person, and tarpaulin enough to smother him over his head and face.

His legs were sticking out exposed to all the fury of the rain, and his better half kicked them with all her might by way of a gentle hint that supper was ready.

"Now then, hold hard," he growled, from under his tarry covering. "Pull some of this off, can't you?"

"However did you come under it like that?" said Mrs. Snadgett, tugging away at the heavy stuff. "Do get up, supper's ready, and I am hungry."

"And so am I; I have been hungry ever since I had anything to eat last. Got out of the way, and pick up that pipe—you're always under a fellow's feet."

Mr. Snadgett's conversation was garnished in a fashion that would not be agreeable to ears polite to record, and his wife swore many a good round oath and thought nothing of it, and she consigned him and his pipe to a warm place and declared she would not pick it up for him nor twenty like him.

His hand was up to enforce his part of the argument in his usual way, and her much-be-laboured head was ducked to avoid a blow, when they were both startled into a cessation of hos-

ilities by the sudden appearance of a woman on the bank close by where they were moored.

It was such an unusual place to see anybody, even in the daytime, that the slight figure looked almost unearthly as it glided forward towards the water.

"It's a ghost, Bill," gasped Mrs. Snadgett, who had a wonderful awe of the supernatural.

"No; it isn't, it's a woman. What on earth is she going to do—is she walking in her sleep, I wonder? Hi, missis! that is not the way to anywhere, you'll be in the water."

Still the figure glided on and took no notice, and they watched it in spite of the rain till it came to the very brink of the water.

Then it took a sharp turn as if suddenly remembering or discovering something—lost its balance and fell with a splash into the deep part of the canal basin.

"Get a light," Bill Snadgett said, "we'll have her."

It was not the first time by many that he had pulled someone out of the water, and he knew exactly where to look for the reappearance of the figure that had gone down so near them.

"She must come by here," he said to his wife, who had obeyed him as quickly almost as he spoke, and was holding up a great torch of tarred rope, which fizzed and spluttered in the wet. "Ah! there she is."

Only for a moment; she disappeared as quickly as she had come to the surface, and it was only by the merest chance that she rose again near enough for them to grasp her clothes.

There was no one to help them, a big space of water was between them and the nearest barge, and if anyone was on board there they seemed to be asleep.

They managed to get her out of the water somehow; though the effort very nearly cost Molly a ducking, and made her husband pant as if he had carried a hundred sacks of coals he declared.

They were good-hearted folks, this untutored bargee and his rough wife.

The unlooked-for event disarranged all their supper and upset Molly's household arrangements, but they thought nothing of it, and took the waif from the water down into their morsel of a cabin and laid her in their only bed, wrapped up in a blanket, before they thought of themselves at all.

"She ain't dead," Bill said, when they saw the breath come back and the heavy eyelids quiver. "You leave her be a bit, and give me my supper; she won't hurt."

Mr. Snadgett dispensed with the ceremony of putting out his food on a plate, but ate it out of the huge bowl into which his wife tumbled it, her spoon playing but a very indifferent part compared to his till the platter was empty.

"I don't like the looks of her, Bill," she said, after an inspection of their unexpected guest, "she seems to me off her head."

"Off her head" implied something very dreadful in Molly's eyes.

The ignorant poor have such strange ideas of delirium, and certainly the insensible girl, for she was no more, was muttering and moaning in a queer fashion, and seemed to know nothing of where she was or what had happened to her.

"Give her a sup of rum," Bill said.

Rum was his panacea for every ill under the sun, and his wife obeyed him.

She forced a little of the liquid down the throat of the girl, but the effect was to make the eyes sparkle with a wild light and the lips to move in more incoherent mutterings than ever.

"What shall we do with her, Bill?" she asked. "She's awful bad, I think."

"I don't know—take her with us, I suppose."

"Take her with us!"

"We can't pitch her into the water as I see," growled Mr. Snadgett, "and I'm not going ashore a hunting a bobby or anyone at this time of night. Let her stay where she is till she comes to a bit—we shall have to start directly almost, and we can put her ashore on the other side."

What he said was sensible enough. It would have been no small trouble to get ashore just then and the chances were if he had done so he would have been a long time finding any one to help him out of his difficulty. The girl was safe there and she would come to her senses all right by the time they were across the river and he had had his supper and felt inclined to enjoy the morsel of ease and quiet that would be his till the daylight brought work and starting time again.

The young woman was alive and he was satisfied, all the rest would come in time. Both he and his wife took the heavy breathing and the half-shut eyes for sleep and left her to herself.

She meant a little; but she was not troublesome, and they had plenty to do.

She must have slept very sound, for the arrival of the son of her host and hostess very drunk and noisy did not awake her.

Bill Snadgett the younger managed to nearly drown himself in his passage along a plank from the wharf to the Saucy Susan, and shouted and stamped when he had accomplished the perilous feat in a fashion calculated to rouse the whole neighbourhood if there had been anything but wharves and warehouses near.

It was right over the head of the girl in the stuffy little cabin, but it never roused her. She might have been a corpse but for the slight quivering of her lips now and then and the rising and falling of her bosom as she breathed with what seemed to be difficulty.

And so the night wore on and the morning saw the barge slowly moving away from the place where the woman had fallen into the canal, bearing her with it to the unknown country on the other side of the river.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE PARISH.

What do we want? Our daily bread—
Leave to earn it by our skill.

THERE was not a vestige of anything to tell where the stranger came from or who she was.

Molly looked over the clothes she had managed to drag off her back as well as the circumscribed limits of the place would permit, but there was no mark on anything.

The linen was old, but fine, and the other articles of clothing were plain and neat, but by no means distinctive.

A plain, black dress, such as any young lady might have worn, neatly made and pretty good, and a hat and mantle, black also and without much ornament, completed her toilette, and not one of the articles had the slightest mark on them by which the owner's name could be discovered. There was nothing in her pockets except one solitary halfpenny, and Mr. Snadgett gave it as his opinion that she had tried to drown herself.

"She's one of them as couldn't stand poverty," he said to his wife, "too proud to beg and too finicking to work. She won't thank us maybe for bringing her to again."

"She will some day if she don't now," Molly said. "Everybody's glad when their lives have been saved when they come to think about it. We've seen that a many times, you and me."

Which indeed they had, for they had been the means of rescuing several poor creatures from a watery grave, and there was scarcely one who was not grateful.

"I don't think this one will have much to say about it," Bill remarked, when his duties permitted him to come down and see how things were going on.

"Why?" Molly asked. She had been obliged to leave her charge very much to herself during their transit, for she as well as her husband was wanted on deck. "She's asleep, ain't she?"

"She's dying I think," Bill replied. "We must have a doctor to her. Look at her, old woman; all that twitching ain't for nothing."

Molly bent over the sleeping girl, whose face was all drawn and distorted as if she were in pain, but who did not seem to be any more conscious than when they first took her on board.

There was a curious look on the pinched features now, a look that to the bargeman and his wife, ignorant as they were of what to do in sickness, seemed to portend nothing but death.

"Whatever shall we do?" Molly said, in dismay. "They'll think we murdered her maybe if she dies here."

"They can't do that, old woman. We'll tell them how she came to us. It's not murder to pull a person out of the water."

"But who's to know that we did pull her out of the water?" Mrs. Snadgett said. "Her clothes are all dry now and she looks more like someone who has been knocked on the head than drowned, and we don't know anyone here. It's awkward."

It certainly was. But Bill proved himself equal to the occasion.

"He was not going to have anything like murder sticking to him," he said, and went off for the nearest doctor at once.

"Lor, Bill, they won't come to the likes of us," Molly said, "it's no good."

"They'll have to come," Bill replied, shortly.

And it seemed he was right. He returned with the doctor in his train, a young man who had been only recently appointed to the parish and had not had time to get hardened to his work.

Shadwell, to which agreeable locality the barge had come, is not a wealthy or aristocratic place, and Mr. Nash, the young surgeon, whose rest Bill Snadgett had disturbed after a hard day's work, had only just been appointed to the post of parish surgeon.

He was charitable and kind-hearted—perhaps on those two accounts the very last man to have the charge of the parochial sick list—and his housekeeper prophesied that he would soon knock himself up if he went on as he did and allowed the people to rob him of all sleep, to say nothing of keeping him in a continual state of poverty by their demands on his purse. He would spend the night after a hard day's work by the side of some poor wretch fighting with death, and watch the case of the poorest pauper with as much interest and care as if he were going to receive a royal fee for his services.

Like Belton Leicester, whose friend and fellow-worker he had been through all their hospital studies, he loved his noble profession for its own sake, and he was something of an enthusiast as his friend was. On this particular day he had been on his feet since breakfast almost without a minute's rest, and the preceding night had been spent by the side of a miserable creature for whose worthless life he had fought step by step till the danger was past and the victory won.

It was small wonder that his housekeeper replied, somewhat churlishly, to the rough-looking man who demanded to see him in no very gentle tones:

"It's no good coming here without an order from the parish," she said. "Mr. Nash can't come to every ragamuffin that comes and wants to drag him out; he's in bed and I shan't wake him, he's working fit to kill himself already."

"I don't know nothing about the parish," growled Bill Snadgett, roused to wrath by her words, "I wants a doctor for someone who is dying—leastways who will die if I don't bring one. I can pay, missis, if that's it, but I'm afraid Death won't wait while I run looking for the parish people to come and stop him."

"It's no use if you stand there and talk all night," the woman said, sourly, "I am not going to disturb my master unless I am forced to. You come and show me an order for him to attend and I'll talk to you then."

"But I tell you she's dying!"

"I can't help that."

"Who is dying? What is the matter, Mrs. Crimp?" asked a voice from above, and Mr. Nash appeared at the top of the stairs in a very scanty costume. "You should have called me at once."

"There's no order, sir."

"Death doesn't wait for them, as he says," Mr. Nash replied. "I'll come down directly, my man."

In an incredibly short space of time he was

downstairs and asking Bill Snadgett all about the object of his visit.

Bill explained pretty lucidly, but his wits were rather astray, partly that he was not accustomed to talk to anyone that did not swear every other word, and partly that he had found the doctor's house rather difficult to discover and had made inquiries mostly at public-houses on the road.

"Why, it is eight and forty hours ago," Mr. Nash said, in dismay, when he had heard the story through.

"Yes, sir, it is nigh on that."

"And she has been insensible ever since?"

"I suppose so, sir; me and my missis thought she was asleep, but she's wild-like now and talks a goodish bit."

Mr. Nash was prepared to see one of the usual class of young women that throw themselves into the river, and thought he should guess from the tawdry clothing what the cause of the act had been. He was not at all prepared for the quiet, intellectual face that was moving restlessly from side to side on the hard pillow and the neat clothes that were shown to him as those of the patient.

There was something very odd about the whole affair. Bill Snadgett and his wife declared that not a soul knew what had happened but themselves, and that there had been nothing about the girl to show who she was. He examined her and found the cause of the delirium. The head had struck against something in falling into the water or rising to the surface, and he feared there was a fracture of the skull.

"She must be taken away from here, of course," he said. "I will see about her being removed to the workhouse. She will stand some little chance of recovery there."

"She'd stand a better with my Molly," Mr. Snadgett said, gruffly. "I don't think much of them workhouses. They would only be too glad if she was to die and rid the parish of the trouble of her."

"They will take care of her where I am," the young man said, quietly. "You need have no fear on that score."

"I've no cause to care anything about her," the bargeman said, "but I got her out of the water, and somehow I feel as if I had a right in her."

Molly was sadly afraid they would be suspected—perhaps accused—of having done the girl a mischief, but Mr. Nash pointed out to her that he could speak to the fact of the blow that had rendered her insensible for so long having been come by under water. There was some of the ooze and slime adhering to her hair still.

So to the workhouse the unknown waif was removed. Mrs. Snadgett accompanied her with her clothes. She had carefully brushed and folded them, and in the process she had made a discovery. Passing her hand over the front of the dress, she had felt something like paper. It was dry now and crackled under her touch. Whatever it was was sewn into the lining of the dress, and Molly took a sharp knife and ripped the seam. She was not much of a needlewoman, but she managed to sew it up again in a sufficiently neat fashion, and she hid the papers and said nothing about them.

"Perhaps they will tell something about who she is," she said to herself, "and be worth money—who knows?"

She could not make much of them when she came to spell them over with immense difficulty, for her education had been somewhat neglected, and the utmost she could do was to make out here and there a word or two of print. There was a marriage certificate which she could read because it resembled her own of which she was so proud, and a few letters which might have been Greek for anything she could make of them.

She went to the workhouse to see her late guest, but she was told she was no better and the doctors were going to perform some operation on her head which would relieve her, and that was the last intelligence she had of her, for they were moved on again to commence their

wandering life and it was very uncertain when she would see London in the time to come.

"And how do you like it all, old boy? Is Springfield as glorious a place as you fancied it would be?"

Mr. Nash asked the question of Belton Leicester, who had come to town to make all the little final arrangements consequent on his change of residence.

"It is a supremely ignorant and benighted place, if there is any glory in that," Mr. Leicester replied, with a laugh. "The people are about as unenlightened as the old woman who tied up her big toe because she had a headache. There's plenty of room for philanthropy and humanising there, and yet a great deal has been done and by a very youthful hand too."

"Meaning the Miss Rivers you wrote me such a rhapsody about the other day?"

"Meaning her."

"Your lady patroness in fact. Are you going to fall in love with her?"

"I fall in love, you forget, Nash—it is not so old yet that I can forget it."

"I beg your pardon I am sure. I spoke hastily."

"And Miss Rivers is engaged, so if I were ever so free to marry, or could make myself her equal, I should have no chance. She is going to throw herself away—for she is a sweet creature and worthy of the best husband in the world—on a man who will break her heart if she is sensitive, or harden it if she is not, in a very little while."

"I think it is as well she is engaged to be married," Mr. Nash said, drily. "You seem very much inclined to chant her praises. Do you know the gentleman, that you speak so feelingly?"

"I do."

"Who is it?"

"Neville Delamere."

"Good heavens! Does she know?"

"I am told that she herself avers that she knows everything concerning the gentleman. I have promised him to be silent as long as he does nothing to outrage her. It is a nasty subject, Nash, let us drop it. How are you getting on?"

"Swimmingly, if too much work is a sign of prosperity. I really think I am doing a good work here."

"Not if you are killing yourself. Anything special on hand?"

"Yes, one very interesting case at the workhouse, an attempted suicide I fancy—girl fished out of the canal with a broken head we have had to trepan, and she is doing very well. Oddly enough the very first word she uttered was the name of the lady you have been talking about."

"Miss Rivers?"

"I thought so; it seemed to me to come out quite plain and distinct. The others thought she said something about falling into the river."

"That's more likely I should think," Mr. Leicester said, "I should like to see her. I have been reading—"

But the reader won't be interested in the technical discussion on the subject of trepanning which followed Mr. Nash's mention of the girl in the workhouse.

(To be Continued.)

SCIENCE.

AN AUTOMATIC GAS-LIGHTER.—Mr. Bagge, of Frankfort, has patented an apparatus for automatic lighting and extinction of gas flames, on entering or leaving rooms which are only temporarily used, and so economising gas. The gas flame is lit by the opening of the door as the room is entered. Closing the door has no action on the apparatus, but on opening it again to leave the room the flame is extinguished. The gas burner used is one already well known. An

American igniting burner in connection with it is so arranged that in turning of the cock a small igniting flame springs up, lights the main burner, and is then itself extinguished. In leaving the room a gas current first springs up (from the igniting burner), and is ignited at the illuminating flame, then the igniting flame diminishes to a very small size, while the main flame goes quite out. With such a burner an arrangement is connected, which is screwed on the door, and produces the desired effects through opening of the door, on entrance and departure. The price is thirty or forty marks.

NEW ELECTRIC DRILL.—Under the name of "an electric hammer" Messrs. Siemens and Halske, of Berlin, have lately patented an arrangement which consists essentially of three coils and a hollow rod of iron or soft steel, which can move to and fro within the coils in the direction of their axis. By means of a constant current, of unvarying direction, sent through the middle coil, the rod is magnetised; and through the other coils a machine or battery sends alternating currents, by virtue of which the rod is alternately drawn in and thrust out with great rapidity. The motion on one side is limited by a spiral spring working an elastic cushion. With a screw arrangement the rod can be worked with the necessary step-by-step rotation in boring rock. When the boring in rock has gone so far that the borer no longer reaches the rock, one of the rod-guiding projections on the upper coil is struck, and this has the effect of displacing all three coils in their stand, wherein they are held fast only by friction.

A PRECURSOR OF THE PHOTOPHONE.—M. Cros drew the attention of the Académie des Sciences, on October 11, to a memoir presented by him in 1872, in which, guided by theoretical considerations, he drew conclusions on the mechanical action of light, which he thinks have a great similarity to those of Prof. Bell. For example, a ray of light sent into a tube resonating with a certain note was interrupted a corresponding number of times in a second, and thus by the alternate condensation and rarefaction of the air sounds were produced.

MANUFACTURE OF PORTLAND CEMENT IN INDIA.—Portland cement is amongst the most recent of Indian manufactures. By a simple and almost purely mechanical process a cement capable of bearing a pressure of 650 to 1,000 lbs. and upwards is produced from ordinary kankar combined with a certain proportion of purer limestone of local origin. A company has been formed, and works have been erected for the production of the cement at Sealdah.

A NEW OIL FROM GRAPE VINES.—The introduction of American vines in France to resist the ravages of the phylloxera is likely to receive a check, since it is claimed that only six or seven varieties do resist the insect's attacks successfully, while none of them produce wine as good as that obtained from the French vines. M. Laliman, a French savant, has discovered, however, that an oil can be distilled from the American vines which will not congeal above eight deg. Fahr., while other oils congeal at twenty-seven and a-half deg. Fahr. M. Laliman, therefore, recommends this oil for watch-making and similar uses.

APPARATUS FOR LIGHTING GAS.—Mr. C. L. Clark and Mr. J. Leigh, both of Manchester, have secured through the Patent Offices provisional protection in respect of an improved apparatus which they claim to have invented for lighting gas. The object of the invention, as stated in the specification, is to construct a convenient, durable, and portable form of hand lamp or apparatus for lighting gas, by means of electric spark, or platinum wire heated by the electric current. This lamp is said to be especially adapted for use in mills, cotton, or other factories, warehouses, and other places where is a danger of fire if the ordinary means of lighting are employed.

MEN who use rood words should never perch themselves on their dignity.



[FORGIVEN.]

THE FORTUNES OF ELFRIDA.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Within a Maze," "Won Without Wooing,"
and other Interesting Stories.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MOURNING.

My husband dead! Will he never speak?
The lips are parted and his tangled hair
Seems as if wa'd upon his pallid cheek,
And smile and everything but breath are there.

It is a terrible thing to look upon a man in his early prime lying still in death.

We look for the King of Terrors to lay his hand on old age, and to take the wayworn traveller home, but he never comes and gathers the strong into his garner house without leaving a rude shock to those who witness his untimely fall.

The Duke of Brabazon was by nature a favoured man. There was nothing lacking apparently—youth, health, and wealth had been his—and yet in a few brief minutes' struggling with the cold, insensate ocean he had lost all and given up his life.

The preachers of old rejoiced over the dead more than the living, for their troubles were past, their hours of temptation at an end, and they had found rest.

But it is not given to all to dive deep into the wisdom of the ordering of all things, and we mourn when we lose our young and speak of the bitterness of death.

Life may be sad but we cling to it, the cup may have its bitterness but we drink of it, the burden may be heavy but we are not willing to

lay it down, and we pity those who are taken away.

Life is worth having, a thing to be proud of, something great to cling to with all its troubles and sorrows.

They took up the dead man and bore him across the beach.

His face wore a smile, but they covered it up. The smile of the dead is more painful than their frown.

The howling storm followed them to the mortuary adjoining the lifeboat house, and here they put him down and closed the doors.

Malcolm and Stapleton were two of the bearers, and now beneath the roof of the melancholy place they spoke in whispers.

"You must bear the news to her," said Malcolm. "Is she far away?"

"Not far," replied Stapleton. "I think I can tell you now. She is here."

"Here?"

"Yes. I came to see her. Carlisle Harvard, Brierly, and Miss Steelson are here too. I think I had better go to them at once. He cannot remain here."

"No! go without delay, Caveall."

"She may return with me. Harvard will be sure to do so. You will not be here?"

"No," Malcolm said. "I will leave here at once. I would I had not been here to-day."

They went out, shook hands at the door, and parted.

Stapleton, with the burden of his terrible message upon him, gave a few instructions to the men in charge of the place, and hastened home to consult his wife, who he knew would advise him well.

He entered hurriedly, struggling a moment with the door forced back by the wind, and entered the sitting-room facing the sea.

Annie was sitting by the window with her little one in her arms.

"What a dreadful storm, Stapleton," she said.

"Fearful," he replied, "and something terrible has happened—"

He pulled up suddenly now, perceiving for the first time that Elfrida was present.

She sat a little back in the shadow of the curtains, so that for a moment she escaped his observation.

Her eyes were fixed on him with an inquiring look.

"You are agitated," she said; "has anything happened to your friend?"

"No," he replied, hesitatingly, "he is better than usual. But the storm has done some mischief— But I think I had better see Mr. Harvard."

He could not resist the influence of her look. It acted like a magnet and drew the truth towards her.

Annie saw he had something terrible to tell, and fearing he would probably blunder in imparting it, and perhaps work mischief, made a sign to him to say no more.

But Elfrida was not to be put off. She saw the intelligence concerned her in some way, and quietly said:

"You can tell me what it is. Has anything happened to my father?"

"No."

"Or Mr. Brierly, or Miss Steelson?"

"No; I have not seen or heard of them this morning."

"What is it then?"

Stapleton looked towards his wife, who promptly said:

"You had better speak out, Stapleton, and be as brief as you can."

"The storm has driven a yacht upon the sands," he began, "and as the coast is highly dangerous—"

Elfrida rose up and came full into the light so that he could see her face.

It was deadly pale, but the look was firm.

"You see I am strong enough to bear anything," she said. "Tell me—is my husband drowned?"

Her voice rang through the room as she uttered the last word with painful emphasis. Stapleton bowed his head and replied, in a low voice and clearly:

"He is."

They heard her wail.

It was little louder than the cry of a sick child on the verge of death, but it pierced their hearts.

Neither had ever heard before a sound so expressive of bitter woe.

But she still stood erect and shed no tears. The fountains of sorrow were dried up by the intensity of her anguish.

After a silence she spoke again.

"Where have they placed him?" she asked.

"In a temporary resting house," Stapleton replied, "until I know your will."

"Go and bid them bring him to me," she said.

"I must have a few minutes alone before I can face my dreadful work."

She stooped down and kissed the child nestling close to its mother.

"Heaven keep and bless it," she murmured, "and spare it from the agony that is mine this day."

Then she kissed it again, and the mother too, and went out followed by Stapleton.

He saw her to her place of residence, a few doors away, and sped back to the mortuary.

There were appliances for the decent carrying of the dead, and strong arms ready to bear all that remained of the Duke of Brabazon to his wife.

"Who he was had been by some means already made known, and a great throng formed a cortege behind and followed to the door."

Some of the foremost saw that which haunted them for many a day afterwards. When the door opened they beheld a woman at the far end of the hall held gently back by a tall, strong man with long beard and bronzed features. They would not, perhaps, have remembered that man again, but the face of the woman was indelibly impressed on their minds.

It was Elfrida, who when they brought her husband in pointed to a room and bade them put him there. While they were obeying her with careful footsteps, she remained by her father's side, with her hand grasping his shoulder so strongly that the tips of her fingers were bloodless.

Their office done, they went out—all but Stapleton Caveall, who drew near to the father and daughter. Elfrida made a movement with her disengaged hand for him to stand aside.

"I am going in to him," she said, "and I must be there alone."

"Elfrida," her father said, "what good will come of giving up yourself to the great agony of the hour? Be resigned—"

"I am," she interposed. "I bear my pain—let me go in."

She would not be stayed, and he yielded. As he let her free from the hold she had upon him she glided swiftly into the room and closed and locked the door.

"My poor child," was all Carslie Harvard could say.

"Is it safe to leave her there?" whispered Stapleton, hurriedly. "She is impetuous and acts on the thought of the moment."

Carslie Harvard sat down groaning on the stairs, and buried his face in his hands.

"Truly," he said, "is man's life a time of labour and sorrow. Oh, Caveall, if your little one be taken from you, do not mourn, but thank God for taking her so early to her rest."

There was the rustling of a dress upon the stairs, and Miss Steelson came down. She put her withered hand upon him and bade him rise.

"It is a sad thing," she said, "but out of great darkness comes the brightest light. Where is Elfrida?"

"In there, with him," he moaned.

"Let her be," said Miss Steelson; "it is by his side that the pent-up agony of her soul will find a vent. Has a message been sent to his mother?"

"Not yet," replied Stapleton.

"Let it be done at once. Send word that he

is dangerously ill. We can break the worst to her when she comes."

Stapleton went forth upon his errand, and Miss Steelson bade Carslie Harvard rise. She led him up to a room where Jacob Brierly sat, broken and bent, with big salt tears upon his cheeks.

"I know little of him," he said, "but I feel for her. She would have felt less for a husband that she truly loved."

A sad trio they were, waiting for her to come back from the presence of the dead. The waiting was a long one—a full hour passed before she was heard coming slowly up the stairs. She came in with eyes red with weeping.

Miss Steelson clasped her hands with thankfulness.

"The worst is over," she murmured, "it will not kill her now."

"Father," said Elfrida, "is there any way in which I can expiate my great sin? Is there no life of loneliness, self-sacrifice, and devotion to others by which I can atone?"

"Elfrida," he said, "we have all done things in our hate or thoughtlessness which we can never put right. But the God above who made all things makes amends for the sins of man. Ask yourself—would he have been happier now if he were alive?"

"But who gave him his misery?" she asked.

"You must not think of that," said Miss Steelson. "Be assured that if he could speak now he would forgive you."

"But can I ever forgive myself?" said Elfrida, and gave vent to a fresh flood of tears.

"Child," said Jacob Brierly, coming over and sitting down beside her, "sorrow is the lot of all. It is the great purifier of man's gross nature. He, with his grief, died a better man than he would have done if his life had known no cloud."

She raised her eyes to him and, looking wonderingly, asked:

"Is it indeed so? You do not say this merely to assuage my pain?"

"No," said he. "Ask yourself what sorrow has done for you. I know what it has done for me, and I thank God that I have travelled in a path of thorns."

It was the first and last time he ever admitted he had suffered, and in those few words he laid his life bare. But they fell not as a reproach upon Elfrida, although her heart told her she had no small share in what he had suffered. This placid resignation lifted her up, and she brushed her tears away.

"You all teach me well," she said, "and henceforth I will like to be worthy of you."

CHAPTER XL.

NEMESIS.

Coarsely told your anger waking
Seeth the end of your career—
Fled on wings of your own making.
Your honour's gone—your life is bare.

Among other things subject to change are love and hate. Our imperfect nature is more apt to retain the latter, but a friendship founded upon it is a brittle thing. For the second time in their lives a dissolution of the affection between Mrs. Wraxall and Mrs. Caveall took place.

They had been successful in marring the peace of the object of their hate, Elfrida, Countess of Brabazon, and indirectly they had brought about the death of the duke. These were great things for petty malice to accomplish, but no great satisfaction was reaped, and the gains were absolutely nil.

Before going abroad Algernon Leighton wrote a letter to Mrs. Caveall, which must have been a little relief to him. He spoke his mind plainly, confounded her heartily and commended her to the care of the author of all mischief. In a postscript he left a similar legacy to Mrs. Wraxall.

When the duke was buried and the duchess had disappeared all good people put their sad

story upon the shelf, and Mrs. Wraxall, being a little tired of it and very much bored by the society of her friend, resolved to effect a severance without delay. She laid a foundation for the final explosion by declining to see her one morning when she called.

In her calculations she had reckoned a little without her host. Mrs. Caveall was prepared for that style of thing, but was also prepared to forcibly resent it. She lost no time in wreaking her vengeance, carrying it out as such a woman might be expected to do, remorselessly and utterly regardless of the recoil upon herself.

There was a certain Mrs. Thornbury, a great friend and admirer of Mrs. Wraxall in her early days, and still holding a little loyalty in her heart, so that she invited her to her receptions.

Seeing Mrs. Caveall had stayed for awhile with Mrs. Wraxall, and that for a time they kept up an apparent close friendship, she also invited that lady, and it was at one of these social meetings that the rupture, amusing to some and painful to many, took place.

Mrs. Wraxall was fond of cards, so was Mrs. Caveall, and both were dexterous players—so good indeed that cynical observers of their game were wont to say that it would be a money-making thing to back their hands as some racing enthusiasts back jockeys' mounts. On this particular night they both sat at the same table as antagonists with the Honourable Henry Grayling and young Tom Green of the Esquiers as their respective partners.

The cards were being dealt and Mrs. Wraxall was speaking to Tom Green, her partner, when Mrs. Caveall put in a remark on the subject spoken of, and Mrs. Wraxall ignored it.

"I said, my dear, that you are wrong by a year," said Mrs. Caveall, sweetly. "Crowley Boin died six months before the time you speak of."

"He was merry to the last," said Mrs. Wraxall, still speaking to her partner. "I don't think I ever knew such a light-hearted man."

Tom said:

"I—ah—believe so," and looked uneasily about him. He saw something was wrong between the women, and had a mortal hatred of being in a "petticoat fight."

The cards were dealt by this time, and three of the players took up their hands; Mrs. Caveall allowed hers to remain upon the table and sat with her eyes fixed upon her old friend, who sorted her hand with an air of indifference.

"I spoke to you, Mrs. Wraxall. May I ask what you mean by your impertinence in not answering me?"

Tom Green leant back in his chair and put his cards close to his face as if he had suddenly become short-sighted.

The Honourable Henry Grayling did not appear to have heard anything and led a small spade.

Mrs. Wraxall put down the five of the same suit. Among the spectators behind the chairs of the players there was a dead silence.

"Spades I think were led," said Mrs. Wraxall, speaking in a general way.

"No," said Mrs. Caveall, "IMPERTINENCE led before the spades. I ask you, woman, what you mean by your insulting behaviour?"

Mrs. Wraxall flushed under her paint, but turned a bold look upon her assailant. She knew it was a duel to the death and made what she hoped would be a mortal thrust.

"I am tired of having a pensioner upon me," she said, "and you could have seen it before if you had chosen."

"A pensioner," screamed Mrs. Caveall, "on you? I worked for what you gave me. You wanted to ruin the young Duchess of Brabazon, and knew I had a tool handy who would say or do anything."

"I don't know what you mean," Mrs. Wraxall said, with some show of confidence, but she was being hard pressed and losing ground fast. Her quick eyes saw the coming change in the faces of those about her.

"Don't lie, woman," said Mrs. Caveall, furiously. "Did you not come to me wanting to hatch up something, and was not young Leighton called in to help us? We did some pretty

work between us—lying here and lying there, and having dark and dastardly paragraphs put in the papers; and the pay for my share of it was being brought back here."

"I did not bring you back."

"It is false. You came to Pentonville where I was living in obscurity, because I was poor, and you led me on to do your bidding. I was ready enough, I know, but I should never have moved in it but for you; you are a treacherous, dangerous woman."

Mrs. Wraxall rose up from her chair and looked round upon the circle of amazed and stupefied spectators.

"This person is mad, I think," she said.

The shot fell harmless, and she read her doom in the looks cast upon her. Already Tom Green had bolted, leaving a lot of small change upon the table, and the Honourable Henry Grayling had turned his chair round from the table, leaving his cards face upwards, and was talking in a low tone with a friend. In these signs she read her final downfall.

"I have method in my madness," Mrs. Caveall said, "and I speak the truth in my ravings. I could tell more if I thought it were wanted, but you have something now to carry through life, and I shall be glad to learn that you are able to bear it."

She swung round with flashing eyes and a little rudely pushed her way through the throng and without taking leave of her hostess left the house. Society shook her over and she left it that night for ever.

A few minutes later Mrs. Wraxall followed and went her way half mad with fury.

After her outspoken friend had left she made a last effort to ridicule her "idle raving," but her remarks were received in dead silence, and no man or woman answered her.

She had a paroxysm of impotent rage ere she courted sleep, and the great restorer did not give her relief from angry thought until the morning had come.

The next morning she astonished her husband by telling him what had occurred, and asking his advice.

It was an entirely new thing for her to consult him on any subject whatever.

"I should go to Paris or Baden-Baden," he said.

"Will you come with me?" she asked.

"No," he said, after a moment's thought. "I can't take my club with me, and all the friends I have in the world are there. Besides, we shall not be much further apart when you are abroad than we have been for years."

It was a keen shaft, the first he had directed at her for a long time, and it struck home.

She called to mind what he had been when she married him, a kind-hearted, generous fellow with plenty of heart in him—but she had frozen it up slowly and made him a man of the world, cold, selfish, and with all his love in his club life.

"You forget how lonely I shall be," she said, softly.

He looked at her with raised eyebrows, and after a long survey indulged in a light laugh.

"Come," he said, "don't you turn soft, or I shall think you have reached your second childhood. You are wrong somewhere. What did you have for supper last night?" It won't do for you to trifle with your digestion—as you did in your young days."

She had made him what he was and could not complain.

But she was reaping what she had sown and the harvest was a heavy one.

"When do you think you will go?" Wraxall asked, as he took a cigar from his case, preparatory to lighting it below.

"I cannot go too soon, it seems," she said, bitterly. "To-morrow."

"Which place will suit you best?"

"Baden-Baden."

"I will look out your trains and arrange your route. Is there anything I can order for you on the way to the club?"

"No; I have all I need."

"I shall look in upon Mason as I go down, he gives the best price for furniture, and when

you are gone I shall shut this place up and go into chambers. By Jove! I shall think I am a bachelor again."

"You seem to take pleasure in the prospect," she savagely said.

"To tell the truth," he replied, "I have for a long time been tired of a home and no home, a wife and no wife, neither single happiness nor wedded bliss, and so a change is welcome. I suppose I shall see you again before you leave?"

"I shall be very busy," she answered, shortly.

"In that case," he replied, "I had better say good bye and wish you bon voyage."

He lightly touched her hand with his and went out with his usual step.

As he was going downstairs she heard him humming a tune, and she crept to the window to look at him as he went up the road.

She had not seen him so young-looking and jaunty for years.

And this was the end of a marriage with only respect for a foundation.

She had often talked of the advantages of such a union, and she was now in a position to preach on the misery of its ending.

"Better, far better," she thought, "to have parted in hate than have him leave me in icy indifference. He has never been dear to me—but I shall miss him now. Great Heaven! what a wretched life is mine."

CHAPTER XL.

THE WORK OF TIME.

How like what thou wert, and art not now!
Yet, oh! how more resembling what thou art!
There dwells no cloud upon thy pictured brow
A sorrow sits no longer on thy heart.

Two years are not a long period of time in the world's history, but they effect many changes.

In two years the big, lumbering, loose-jointed boy may become a man, and the gawky, shy girl a handsome, composed woman.

Death is very busy, births are incessant, and the active brains of men and women are for ever producing something new.

Two years have passed:

Some of those who played minor parts in Elfrida's history have dropped out of it.

Mrs. Wraxall will trouble her no more. All her town friends and the circle around Castle Tournay have ceased to think of her and she is only one of many who have made more than an ordinary mark, good or bad, in society's records.

Hastings knows a little of her, but not much, for this widowed duchess and her father are seldom seen abroad at fashionable hours, never go to a place of public entertainment, receive no visitors and make no friends.

She has a house on the cliff behind the Marine Parade, a lone spot, only sought by lovers and misanthropes, and her house is half hidden for them.

Wrapped in his blissful thoughts the lover has no care for the duchess, and the misanthrope, busy with his real or fancied woes, can give no time to the sorrow of others.

To this place Elfrida and her more intimate friends went after the wreck at Shingleham and the death of the duke, and her only visitors from afar were Stapleton Caveall and his wife—always, as a matter of course, accompanied by a nurse and that wonderful baby.

But one day a haggard woman of faded, genteel appearance rang the bell at the gate and asked to see the Duchess of Brabazon.

"What name, ma'am?" asked the footman.

"Mrs. Caveall, senior."

Elfrida had never been afraid of her old chaperone and was not afraid of her now, but, desirous of being spared further insult, she said:

"Not at home."

The man took his message, and after some delay came back with a slip of paper on a salver.

"The lady is so pressing, your grace," he said, "and I thought I might take the liberty of bringing this."

Elfrida opened the paper and read, "In mercy see me. I am here as a suppliant," and the words were palpably written by a trembling hand.

"Show Mrs. Caveall in," she said, and in a few minutes she came in with a broken and humbled mien.

"I am sorry to see you unwell," Elfrida said; "won't you sit down?"

"Not until you say you will forgive me for the past," the old woman replied. "I can't rest as I think of it. I am growing old and shall soon cease to trouble anybody. You need not be angry with me now."

"If I have anything to forgive, it has been forgiven long ago," Elfrida said.

"Spoken like your generous self," said Mrs. Caveall. "It is not every one would forgive the malicious bite of a pampered friend. You were always kind to me."

"Not always," I fear.

"Kinder than I deserved—and the memory of what I have done haunts me. But for me you might now be happy, holding your high position and gracing it."

"I may differ from you on that point, but we will not discuss it. Again let me beg of you to rest while you are here. Can I offer you anything?"

"No," Mrs. Caveall said. "You have given me what is more welcome than food or wine, and I will go and trouble you no more. I would thank you if I could, but my heart is too full. I have suffered deeply."

"Perhaps you are poor," said Elfrida. "Can I in any way assist you? I am rich with more than I can possibly spend."

"No. You are indeed good, but you must not crush me with your generosity. I have all I require. Stapleton is a good son and is more than kind to me. He is prosperous and I am above want. I am here against his will. He was anxious I should not intrude upon your sorrow."

"You have not intruded. I am glad to see you with such a request. I cannot lay claim to deserving it. But let us bury the past."

Mrs. Caveall rose with a bright look upon her face and drew near to Elfrida, lowering her voice as she said:

"The past being forgotten may I speak of the present?"

"Assuredly."

"And of yourself?"

"I do not think you will help me—but you may say what you please."

"Is it wise of you to waste all your young life in unavailing sorrow? Shall the garden be left to the mercy of the weeds for one error in its culture?"

"I understand you and thank you for a good intention," Elfrida said, "but I do not think I can now change it."

"Heaven send you may," said Mrs. Caveall, "I could not resist the impulse to speak of it. Again forgive me."

Elfrida gave the old woman her hand and Mrs. Caveall raised it to her lips and kissed it.

"I wish I had been wiser two years ago," she said, and left her.

After she was gone Elfrida sat thinking. "Is it wise of you to waste all your young life in unavailing sorrow?" That was the question. She was young, in the early bud of womanhood; but, oh! so old in sorrow. It seemed an age since she looked upon the dead man brought up from the sea shore, but the memory of that hour was vivid still.

"Why waste your young life?" She thought there was a temptation in those words to lure her from a righteous course. Was it not just to the memory of the dead that she should live from the world and mourn the great error of her life incessantly? How could she forget what was due to the dead?"

Again another thought. What was the will of the dead? She had it in her power to know what was his will when living, but the packet he left behind him was still unopened. She crossed the room and took it from its resting place in the escritoire, and turned it over and over slowly.

"To be opened in case of my death."

It was a command of her husband when living—the wish of the man she had sworn to love, honour and obey. But she took refuge in the Jesuitical subterfuge that his command did not desire her to open it IMMEDIATELY after he was gone.

She had keen instincts and she guessed at the nature of the injunction he had left behind him, but until it was revealed she need not obey it.

A great struggle went on within her that day. The words of Mrs. Caveall roused some slumbering thoughts and racked her with pangs half-soothed by time. Would the contents of the packet add food to the fire or extinguish it?

At length with a violent effort she rose and hurried the packet back to its place—closing and locking the drawer with a firm hand.

"Not yet," she said, "not yet. I will not now linger near it."

She rang the bell and desired the servant who obeyed her summons to have horses saddled for herself and Mr. Harvard, and went in search of her father, whom she found reading with Jacob Brierly.

"I am going to ride to-day," she said, "and have ordered a horse for you. You sit too much at home."

"We all do that," he replied. "Let us make an excursion of it. Brierly, you and Miss Steelson will drive at the same time."

Jacob Brierly, who had not changed for the better, but was wan and worn in appearance, acquiesced with the grace of a man who is willing to do anything to please others but is indifferent as to the nature of the thing to be done, and the carriage was ordered.

They went in the direction of Coggleshall ground, where the common ferns grow so abundantly, the carriage in front and the riders behind.

Carslie Harvard's spirits rose as he went along, and Elfrida certainly was happier than she had been since that fatal morning at Shingleham.

Arriving at the north end of the ground, they reined up, the carriage was stopped, and both horses and carriage were given over to the servants.

"Shall we walk in the wood?" Elfrida suggested.

"A walk in the wood by all means," everybody said, and they strolled into the cool shade.

In a little while they came to a mossy bank and sat down.

Their talk was of the beauty of the scenery and the wonders of the world we live in.

Carslie Harvard, with some contempt, spoke of those who openly preferred to deride the beauties of physical life, but Elfrida took up cudgels in defence of the recluse rather warmly.

"Suppose," she said, "you have some great sorrow. What would you do? Go into the world and be gay?"

"I would fight against the sorrow and not against the world," her father replied.

She became thoughtful after this, but not sad. She seemed to be reasoning out something, and they wisely let her alone.

On the way home she spoke of a secluded life again.

"Under no circumstances can it be tolerated?" she said.

"I think not," replied Carslie Harvard. "It is not good for man to live alone, and what is not good for man is bad for a woman, depend on it."

Elfrida sighed.

"When people shut themselves out from the world they sometimes find a difficulty in returning to it," she said. "A friend lost is seldom regained."

He looked earnestly at her for a moment and smiled.

That night, after a long chat with Miss Steelson, he sat down and wrote to Malcolm Gordon.

The ice was broken, and rides and drives became things of every day. The weather was favourable to out-door exercise, and under its exhilarating influence the bloom returned to Elfrida's cheeks and the smiles to her lips.

With that change there arose a marked difference in the appearance of her friends near her.

Even Jacob Brierly became another man, shook several years off his shoulders, and did what he had scarce done since Elfrida's childhood, indulged in a jest.

"We shall be giving a ball soon," he said, and I mean to dance at it. You must keep the first dance for me, Miss Steelson."

"People older than you dance," Miss Steelson said, "but I have arrived at an age when I must join the spectators."

A week had elapsed since the drive to Coggleshall ground, and the weather continued fine. The morning was charming, and Elfrida was engaged in arranging some flowers when her father came softly in.

"You are not going out to-day?" he said.

"Yes, if agreeable to you," she replied, "but why do you look at me so seriously?"

"Elfrida, would you mind an addition being made to our party?"

A little of the colour fled from her cheeks as she murmured:

"An addition?"

"Only one more," Carslie Harvard said, "but I see you are doubtful. He is in the house and I must send him here to plead his own cause."

She could not speak, and held out her hands imploringly for him to stay, but he left her with a smile and a minute later his place was taken by another, who came quietly in.

"Elfrida, will you not speak to me?"

"Leave me," she said, without looking up. "I am unworthy of you."

"No," he said, "I can never leave you again of my own free will. You must drive me from you with harsh words if I am to go. I am here to ask you to gladden my life and begin a new one yourself. Do not forget how true I have been, do not let us part again."

"Your answer you shall have, Malcolm," she said. "It was written more than two years ago by my unfortunate husband."

She opened the escritoire, and, taking out the packet left by the duke, handed it to him.

"Open it and read it," she said.

There were visible trembling hands as he broke the seal, but through a mist before his eyes he read the following, written in a bold, clear hand:

"NEVER mourn for me. Now that I am gone marry the man you love, Malcolm Gordon. It is the only reparation of the wrong done by me in coming between you."

"Truly a nobleman," Malcolm murmured.

"Elfrida, you see?"

"I have read," she replied.

"And I hold you to the answer," he said, and drew her close to him. "Oh, darling, here is compensation for treble the sorrow and anguish I have borne."

"I am at rest," she said.

And he put his lips to hers as her face lay nestled on his breast.

No longer Duchess of Brabazon, but Mrs. Malcolm Gordon, the wife of a man who is rising in the world and as the younger member of Parliament for Easterley had already made his mark, and there is talk of his eventually doing what many men have done before, earning a title of his own; but whether he does or not Elfrida is a happy woman with their little children, one of them so like what she was long, long ago, and she asks no more.

Miss Steelson is getting very old, but is upright still. Jacob Brierly has perceptibly gone back and jests of returning to his boyhood. Carslie Harvard is scarcely beyond his prime. Stapleton Caveall thrives, and all are happy, for the clouds have passed and the sun is shining after rain.

[THE END.]

MR. EDWARD SMITH, of Spilsby, Lincolnshire, died in May, 1820. His constant practice was to ride on a bull, and instead of smoking tobacco

he had some hay salted, and smoked it. By his will he directed that his body should be carried to the grave by poor men, who were to be paid 5s. each; that the funeral should take place early in the morning; and that none of his relatives or friends should attend, or any mourning be worn by them on his account, under a forfeiture of their respective legacies.

OUR COLUMNS FOR THE CURIOUS.

THE ENGLISH SAMSON.—We mean, of course, the hero of sacred history. Few of our strong men have equalled the astonishing strength and feats of William Joy. He was a native of Kent, and born in 1675 at St. Lawrence, near Ramsgate. Among his many extraordinary performances may be recorded: 1. A strong horse, urged by the whip to escape his powerful rein, is restrained and kept from escape solely by the check of his pull, aided by a strong rope, and this without any stay or support whatever. 2. Seated upon a stool, with his legs horizontally elevated, solely by muscular power, he jumps clearly from his seat. 3. To prove the agility and flexibility of his joints, he places a glass of wine on the sole of his foot, and, in an erect posture, without the least bending of his head or body, raises his glass to his mouth and drinks the contents, turning his foot with both hands to accommodate his draught. 4. Aided by a strong leather girdle or belt, and supporting himself by pressing his arms on a railing, he lifts from the ground a stone of the enormous weight of 2,240 lbs. 5. A rope fastened to a wall, which had borne 3,500 lbs. weight, without giving way, is broken asunder by his amazing strength. The celebrity of this man attracted the curiosity of King William the Third, before whom he exhibited at Kensington. . . . In the year 1794 the writer of "Memoirs of Remarkable Persons" saw at the Admiralty Coffee House, Charing Cross, a man named Sheppard, a sergeant in the Coventry Volunteers, commanded by Colonel Troughton; Sheppard was then about five or six and twenty years of age, and was remarked by his comrades and friends for extraordinary strength. Some officers and their friends desired to witness his exhibitions. Sheppard wished to have a few oysters sent for, the largest that could be procured (and large ones they were); he took six and devoured them shells and all, in a manner we generally see a person munch a biscuit. A heavy mahogany coffee-house table, seven feet long and four wide, he fixed his teeth in, placing his arms behind him, and by mere strength elevated the end to touch the ceiling. He likewise took two men of moderate size, one in each hand, raised them from the ground and held them at arm's length; but he acknowledged his superior strength to lie in his jaw and neck. He has been known to take a pewter pint pot and tear it to pieces with his teeth.

STRANGE STORY OF LIFE FROM THE DEAD.—In the reign of King Charles I., writes Mr. Baring Gould, a strolling musician, a poor piper, named John Bartendale, was brought in 1634, before the Assizes, and was convicted of felony. He received sentence, and on March 27th was hanged on the gallows, outside Micklethwait Bar, York. There were no houses there at that time—it was open country. After he had remained swinging for three quarters of an hour, and was to all appearance dead, he was cut down and buried near the place of execution. Earth has a peculiarly invigorating and restorative effect; and patients suffering from debility are by some medical men now-a-days placed in earth baths with the most salutary effects. In the case of gangrened wounds a little earth has been found efficacious in promoting healthy action of the skin. John Bartendale was now to experience the advantages of an earth bath. That same day, in the afternoon, one of the Vavasours of Hazlewood was riding by, when he observed the

earth moving in a certain place. He ordered his servant to alight; he himself descended from his horse, and together they threw off the mould, and discovered the unfortunate piper alive. He opened his eyes, sat up, and asked where he was, and how he came there. The man was sent for restoratives, and before long the news had spread about town Michaelgate that the poor piper was come to life again. At the following Assizes he was brought up again. It was a nice point at law whether a man could be sentenced to execution again after the sheriff had signed his affidavit that the man had been hanged till he was dead. Mr. Vavasour made earnest intercession that the poor fellow might be reprieved, popular sympathy was on his side, the judge was disposed to mercy, and Bartenale was accorded a full free pardon, the judge remarking that the case was one in which the Almighty seemed to have interfered, and that he was not disposed to deny the piper a prolongation of his days on earth. After his wonderful deliverance the poor fellow turned hostler, and lived very honest afterwards. When asked to describe his sensations on being hung he said that when he was turned off flashes of fire seemed to dart before his eyes, and were succeeded by darkness and a state of insensibility.

STRANGE WILLS.—If it is a keen trial for a husband to leave his wife, for a young man to be taken from his pleasures, or a commercial man from his business, can we wonder at old ladies feeling the loss of their dear cats, or at old bachelors being distressed at having to part with their faithful dogs? To part with these for ever too, unless we believe in the suggestion of Bishop Butler, and John Wesley, and Leibnitz, and Theodore Parker that there is a future for beasts, and enjoy the confidence of the Rev. W. Sewell, of Exeter College, Oxford, who dedicated one of his published poems to his pony in the next world. The Count de Mirandole, who died in 1825, left a legacy to his favourite carp, which he had nourished for twenty years in an antique fountain standing in his hall. The following clause from a will was in the English papers for March, 1828:—"I leave to my monkey, my dear, amusing Jacko, the sum of £10 sterling, to be enjoyed by him during his life; it is to be expended solely in his keep. I leave to my faithful dog Shock, and to my beloved cat Tib £5 sterling apiece, as yearly pension." But a more curious case still is that of Mr. Berkeley, of Knightsbridge, who died May 5, 1805. He left a pension of £25 per annum to his four dogs. This singular individual had spent the latter part of his life wrapped in the society of his curs, on whom he lavished every mark of affection. When anyone ventured to remonstrate with him he would reply, "Men assailed my life, dogs preserved it." This was a fact, for when attacked by brigands in Italy he had been rescued by his dog, whose descendants the four pets were. People show their love in different ways. Counsellor Winslow, of Copenhagen, who died June 24, 1811, ordered by will that his carriage horses should be shot, to prevent their falling into the hands of cruel masters.—"Curiosities of Olden Times."

THE BEAR GARDEN IN SOUTHWARK.—Bear-baiting was one of the favourite amusements of the romantic age of Queen Elizabeth, and was introduced among the princely pleasures of Kenilworth in 1575, where the droll author of the account introduces the bear and dogs deciding their ancient grudge by a duel. It is hardly to be wondered at that an amusement thus patronised by the great and even by royalty should have been the delight of the others. On a Sunday in 1582 a dire accident befell the spectators. The scaffolding suddenly gave way and multitudes of people were killed or maimed; but the barbarous amusement went on. There was a large bear-garden on the bankside in Southwark, not far from Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, Blackfriars. Under James the bear-garden was under the protection of royalty, and the mastership of it was made a patent place. The celebrated actor, Alleyn, of Dulwich fame, enjoyed the lucrative post of keeper of the king's wild beasts, or master of the royal bear-garden, at Bankside. In the

neighbourhood of Southwark and the present Blackfriars Road was the old Falcon tavern, celebrated for having been the daily resort of Shakespeare and his dramatic companions. The practice of bear-baiting was checked by Parliament in 1642, but it did not wholly discontinue in the neighbourhood of London till 1750, and even later it was revived in Westminster. The "swells" of those days were as bad as the common people, and even now the goings on at the fashionable Hurlingham and the Windsor hunting of a poor tame stag are, to say the least, discreditable. A better public sentiment has arisen.

"OLD BOOTS."—"Old Boots," a well-known character at Ripon in the eighteenth century, was born about the year 1692. What his real name was we do not know. He was for a long time boot-cleaner to an inn at Ripon. He was remarkable for a very long nose curving downwards and extending an inch and a quarter beyond his lips, and a chin which extended straight before him and almost met his nose. When visitors at the inn gave him a gratuity he received it on his chin, and held it fast there with his nose until he deposited it in his money-box. People often gave him money for the sake of seeing him carry it about in this singular fashion. He could rub the tip of his nose with his chin, and used to say that if he let his beard grow it would bury his nose. He created great diversion among the servant maids by attempting to kiss them, a feat he could never accomplish. He turned his face sideways to get a kiss, and his nose and chin caught the rosy cheeks like a pair of crab's claws. But to kiss was an impossibility, for when he had thus fastened the damsel his mouth was open and could not be closed. He died in 1762 at the age of seventy.—"Yorkshire Oddities, by Rev. S. Baring Gould."

THE SWORD FISH.—The formidable sword-fish is tolerable eating, especially when young, and there are fisheries for its capture in the Mediterranean. The fishermen of Messina and Reggio fish by night, using large boats, carrying torches and a mast, at the top of which a man is stationed to announce the approach of their prey, which is harpooned by a man standing in the bows. This fish attains the length of five or six feet, its sword forming three-tenths of its length. It is one of the whale's natural enemies, and it objects to ships. There are many cases cited of ships' bottoms having been pierced by it. Some carpenters having occasion to examine a ship just returned from the tropics found the sword of one of these fishes buried in the lower timbers. They averred that to drive a pointed iron bolt of the same size to the same depth would require eight or nine blows with a thirty-pound hammer. It was further evident from the position of the weapon that the fish had followed the ship while under full sail; it had penetrated the metal sheathing and three and a half inches of the timber.

IN A FIX.—A certain individual being somewhat short and somewhat dry, walked into a store and purchased three biscuits. Before paying, seeing that the worthy shopkeeper had cider, he came to the sage conclusion that he was more dry than hungry, and asked permission to "swap" the biscuits for the cider. Finishing the cider, with an appreciative smack of the lips, he turned on his heel to go out, when the shopkeeper said, "Come, pay me for the cider." "Didn't I swap the biscuits for the cider?" said the other. "Well, then, pay me for the biscuits," said the puzzled trader. "Haven't you got them on the shelf? what are you hindering me for?—my time's valuable." And off he went. The shopman was for a time fairly fogged; indeed it took him some time to get over the memory of that transaction.

NEWSPAPER READERS.—Shenstone, the poet, divided the readers of a newspaper into seven classes. He says: The ill-natured look at the list of bankrupts, the poor to the price of bread, the stockjobber to the lies of the day, the old maid to marriages, the prodigal to the deaths, the monopolists to the hopes of a wet and bad harvest, the young misses to all matters relative to Gretna Green and elopements.

ZILLAH THE GIPSY;

OR,

LOVE'S CAPTIVE.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT THE OPERA HOUSE.

Men'ried his passion fingers
With still delusive sway,
Tho' truth's relentless fingers
Long dash'd the dream away,

It was the height of the London season, and nothing could well be more flattering than the favour shown by aristocratic society to dramatic stars and luminaries of the operatic world.

Zaire, Countess Desrolles, one of the chief favourites of the musical public, was in her glory; she went in to dinner parties on the arm of some scion of a royal or lordly race with the air and grace of a woman who under no stretch of the imagination could ever have been acquainted with the mysteries of a little tobacco-shop in Munich. But it was there she had been first unearthed by an enterprising sausage-machine maker, under whose protection she had visited Paris, and by slow yet sure degrees risen to dizzy heights of fame. What must she think of the musicians' gallery at the Duke of Doncaster's mansion in Park Lane, or the three blue drawing-rooms en suite, or the ancestral portraits of dead-and-gone Doncasters, as she strolls through picture-galleries with Prince Carrebas, a Spanish millionaire full of æsthetic fervour, in humble attendance?

But Zaire is used to all this now. She is prima donna at Her Majesty's, she has had three fortunes left her, she is a beautiful, mutinous, charming creature who creates a sensation wherever she goes. But even Zaire has lately received a painful shock to her feelings. A new rival has arisen and is carrying all before her.

"It is perfectly horrible to listen to people," Zaire is saying to-day, with a petulant stamp and grimace, "they declare this Corelli has all sorts of extraordinary touches of pathos and sentiment, throws herself heart and soul into every part, and has no stage smiles or tricks. But I know she has a formidable 'claque,' and has heavily bribed the press—that's how success is bought now-a-days."

Zaire was lunching at the Duchess of Doncaster's when she made this telling speech, and every one paused to listen.

The Ladies Delamere, who were present, thought it awfully clever and nodded approvingly at their mother. Madeline listened indifferently. But the Duke of Clydale smiled. He was acquainted with Zaire's brief and often brutal summary of rivals.

"I must confess that I'm anxious to hear Mademoiselle Corelli," he said. "I think of going to the opera to-night, she will appear as Donna Elvira in Don Giovanni. Of course she's far too youthful for the part, but they say she's quite superb as that forsaken lady."

"Too youthful," repeated Zaire, spitefully; "they're all twenty-five till they're forty, you know, and she's a great deal older than I am."

The fair Desrolles was thirty-seven, bien sonnée, but dressed for eighteen.

"She is young," said Bertram, enjoying Zaire's smothered rage—"quite a girl they say."

"Oh, there are all sorts of extraordinary stories about her," said Lady Delamere, indifferently, "but she prefers to enshroud herself in a veil of mystery. I suppose she thinks it is more piquant, adds to her popularity, and makes nice little tit-bits of scandal for the new society papers; and people with equivocal reputations form delicious stuffing for literary cooks to season their dishes with."

Zaire had sworn to ruin if possible this dangerous rival. She had spared neither time, money nor intrigue in doing so. Her powerful claque had hissed the new prima donna, and the first rows of amphitheatre stalls and gallery filled with her paid detractors and artistic

assassins had overturned the harmony of the entertainment on more than one occasion, and yet the girl stood her ground. The public approved, the vox populi here was true and strong. Mathias also checked Zaire's efforts and Zillah's superb voice, beauty and irresistible genius did the rest.

And to-night Zaire resolved to examine this young rival very closely. She had not yet seized a perfect opportunity of studying her powers and gauging her possibilities. She was quite depressed and out of temper. The duke purposely irritated her she fancied, and to find herself not Duchess of Clydale was a painful reminder of her only one great failure.

Soon after luncheon the guests dispersed. Zaire swept down the staircase on Prince Carretas's arm and entered her barouche, telling the footman she wished to drive for two hours ere returning home.

The Duchess of Doneaster and her friends, the Delameres, sauntered into the musicians' gallery. Sir Guy Chichester and other friends arrived for the five o'clock tea, much to the satisfaction of the young ladies. But the Duke and Duchess of Clydale returned home to their mansion in Eaton Square.

"What a horrid creature that Desrolles is," Madeline was saying, as she and the duke were sitting together at dinner that evening. "She says dreadful things, and seems quite to enjoy boasting of them."

The duke shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing succeeds like success," he answered. "She may be as daring as she pleases now—they all like it. Every spontaneous outburst is looked upon as a proof of her genius."

"Do you really mean to see 'Don Giovanni' to-night?" the duchess asked, lingering by his side, after dessert was served. "I feel so tired, dear. I'm afraid you must go without me."

"You may as well stay and see the first act. There can be no fatigue in being up till ten o'clock. After that we will leave if you like."

Madeline assented listlessly. She knew Zaire Desrolles would be present, that her box faced the duke's, and there had been something so daring and unabashed in the fair prima donna's insolence that she knew Zaire would be quite equal to taking her place in the box and flirting with the duke in her absence.

"I cannot think why the Desrolles is so popular," she said, looking into his eyes.

"I will tell you. In the first place, she sings well. She has the stage smile and walk and wave of the arms to perfection. She has no emotion whatever—she thinks more of the audience than of the character she represents, but she is dramatic to a certain degree. She has no sympathy, no aspirations, but she is quick and clever. She understands the age she lives in, and she suits her generation."

"You—you never cared for her, Bertram, did you?" Madeline asked. "Was she connected with your idyl of the woods? Ah! dear, there was some girl you tenderly loved, and I—"

It was an unfortunate allusion. He smiled at her rather oddly, as if pitying her want of tact.

Madeline kissed his brow with trembling, impatient love—she wound her arms about his throat.

"There is an old saying, my dear Ida, and it is a wise one, believe me," he said, a little sadly: "Let sleeping dogs lie. I love you. Nothing can change our destiny."

"No, you do not," she said, with troubled eyes. "No, no. Love comes unbidden—unexpected. But tell me, Bertram, it was not the singer whom we met to-day. I dread her influence—she is wicked and unscrupulous."

"It was not Zaire Desrolles," he answered, wearily. "Make yourself well satisfied on that point, and if any fancy once besieged my heart, remember, Ida, it is all stamped out—dead—forgotten."

She believed him, and he imposed on himself in thinking he had escaped the thrall and tyranny of an unconquered love, and crushed all rebel yearnings.

Zillah's artistic career had indeed been hitherto wonderfully successful. She had sung at all

the principal opera-houses on the Continent. Homage and adulation were showered upon her, wherever she went. She sang with exquisite taste and feeling, but since commencing her engagements in London her nerves had been somewhat shaken.

Those unknown enemies of hers were so dangerous and powerful, such cruel stories were circulated to her detriment, the noise and hisses that frequently greeted her appearance in first acts destroyed her self-possession. She dreaded the awful ordeal awaiting her to-night. She felt that it was beginning to wear her out—to haunt her dreams.

But then again she knew that she was a great artist, art was an instinct in her soul, Mathias and others greater than he had told her so. Famous composers were writing special parts for her personation, and yet that bitter drop of hatred poisoned the happiness she might have found in fame.

Why did they refuse to do her justice—why pursue her with malevolence and calumny?

And then indignant flashes would dart from her eyes, and she would laugh with reckless, defiant disdain, feeling the same contempt for these malicious, unjust judges and detractors as Circe may have felt regarding the herd of swine.

Zillah was staying at a West End hotel during the London season, and she had only seen the duke once, and then he had not recognised her.

By degrees the knowledge that Madeline was in truth the Lady Ida dawned upon her mind.

She cared less for the treacherous wickedness of her Aunt Alesia than for what she considered the calculating coldness of the duke.

Thyra had decoyed her into a snare in childhood, and out of this snare Lady Alesia and Madeline had profited with unscrupulous cunning, but Zillah resolved to strike for her rights when the time came.

Mathias bade her wait, he was working in her interests, he was defeating her enemies with their own weapons.

In the meantime the stronger and the wealthier Zillah became the better able would she be to defy the machinations of her foes.

As she was going through her part for to-night the door of the room in which she was sitting opened and Mathias entered. In the flush and glory of her genius and fame Zillah ever remembered what she owed him—how he had saved and sheltered her; she bade him enrich himself with her earnings, and showered costly gifts upon him, but he was a man of such simple tastes and habits he put them all aside, grateful that she had realised his ambitious hopes and content to look on at the fruits of his work.

"We've had a sharp struggle during our campaign in London, little one," he said, resting his hand on her hair, "but we shall win. Have courage—do not fear."

Fear!

She smiled at him in her bright, defiant way.

Was she not Zillah, the gipsy, a child of nature, who had listened to the echo of mighty tempests and the winds sighing through pine forests, and in every phase of nature's changes, wails or frenzies, had revelled in her joyous, free-born life?

"I am not one of them," she said, proudly. "Why do they refuse me justice? I never harmed them to my knowledge."

"It is a war. The woman will stick at nothing to ruin you. I believe she'd almost seek to poison you."

"Then it is a woman?"

"Your enemy is Zaire Desrolles."

Zillah held her breath, startled at the name.

"Zaire Desrolles?"

"Yes. I've traced it all to her, but, perhaps, my Zillah, this torture will be for your good. Even as the eagle wounds its little one's breast to teach it to soar on high, so may this pain be for the best. It will make you grander and more glorious. You will surpass everything you have yet attempted—many a deathless ode has been written during the travail of the soul."

"But why should she hate me?"

"Why? Che-che, there is no reason in a woman, she has had everything her own way up to now—you are younger, fairer, more gifted, it must, therefore, be war to the knife between you."

Zillah, divined from this that another fierce battle would be waged to-night; but her heart did not quail, new fire burnt in her veins, she had not only the public to please and the critics to satisfy, she had to conquer an enemy. Her dark eyes deepened in wrath, but her lips were firm and compressed.

"She shall see that I defy her," muttered Zillah, as she went down to the opera-house.

The artists even found her quiet and taciturn, but to-night something passionate and fierce held possession of her.

Zillah did not understand her mood, her hands had no tremor, she felt self-sustained, and as if detached from earth.

And now came the fatal moment.

Zillah, as Donna Elvira, had just sung her first solo, "Ah! l'ohi midicmai," when the sound of hisses caught her ear.

They came from the gallery. They were, however, drowned in her own plaudits.

"Brava, brava, bravissima," rang through the house.

Never had Zillah looked more lovely, or sung with finer pathos. The solo was encored—the opposition were obliged to abandon their tactics—popular admiration was again too strong for them—and the deep, rich, sonorous voice of the young prima donna penetrated every heart.

In the middle of the solo Zaire Desrolles and some friends entered a box, and some one whispered that it was an encore. She glanced at the gallery with dark and furious displeasure, and then at the amphitheatre stalls where her "claques" were ranged.

"Curse the girl," muttered Zaire between her teeth, "she carries all before her."

If looks could kill, then surely Zillah would have died, slain by the murderous hatred in her rival's eyes, but Zillah only saw that scowling fixedness of glance upon her face and read the malevolent envy, the remorseless malice.

After the first brilliant success all adverse demonstrations were futile; again Zillah had won, and in the more energetic scenes she rose to every situation with superb dramatic power, beside which the light of others paled and waned.

When the finale of the last act commenced the duke and Madeline entered their box—it was at a moment when the tenor—a young Spaniard of splendid presence, and a voice very little inferior to that of Rubini—was throwing himself fully into the spirit of his part, that of the gay and heartless libertine.

Don Juan was in his glory—he was in the zenith of his wild career; pleasure and luxury surrounded him, and the sighs of his victims only added keener relish to his conquests.

And now came the terezetto of the three masks, in which Zillah took part; they then retired and the scene rose, displaying preparations for rustic dances and festivals.

Don Juan here again surpassed all others in animation, endeavouring to entrap the silly Zerlina. He separates her from her lover and the fascinating host is besieged by indignant peasants, disgusted with his treachery.

Up to this time the duke had looked on carelessly and indifferently as this portion of the hero's fortunes advanced; he seemed indeed bored with everything. He had seen it all so often, he knew the part by heart—and he had been disappointed at not hearing the new prima donna in the first act. He watched the heartless Don Juan seize upon Leporello, threatening to kill him for having ensnared the rustic maiden. He gazed at Zaire through his opera glass—how pale blue tried her complexion, she looked quite old—and then took a survey of the house. He saw the smiling hatred in her eyes whenever that masked girl sang. She was singing now with passionate power and thrilling denunciation the splendid passage in which the base betrayer is threatened with overwhelming

ruin, when her mask fell and her eyes rested on the duke's with an unearthly gaze of indefinitely anguish, while tremulous emotion swept over her features.

One instant—only one instant—and he understood it all. It was Zillah. His quickened pulses, his wildly beating heart warned him that he loved her still. Oh! Heavens, should he ever see the pain in those grave, troubled eyes—should he ever forget that she was once his idol? Once? He adored her still—one glance had undone the resolves of months of separation. Oh! love that comes unhidden, why is it impossible to break all your sweet memories by an effort of the will when reason points to the folly and madness of cherishing them? Duty and honour waved him back from memory's portals, and something in Zillah's expression too. He had struck—she had wounded—but she lived on. Was she not strong, was she not brave, had she not defied the sense of loss and the cruel desolation?

The colour rushed to his face, his hand shook over his opera glass. She had never once sought or reproached him, and he believed her guilty; she who was too proud and pure to stoop to sin. He loved her still, he should mourn for her always; he must school his heart to forgetfulness, he must go on the same and with the soul of his soul for ever absent.

Again their eyes met, but he saw no idolatrous love in hers, but rather fierce exultation. They burnt, they were sad, but beneath the sorrow and the fire was something like the frost of contempt, and the shrank from that withering scorn.

"She despises me," he murmured, but loved her more since she now could wound and was brave and defied him.

For this is a man's way always.

Zillah was glad he should meet her thus—the "bravas" were still deafening—bouquets were showered on her; she had won at last, and this was the moment of her triumph and reward.

Carried away with excitement, he had forgotten that a jealous wife watched and criticised every glance. Madeline had seen that start of surprise, that deepening colour, when the mask fell and the features of the prima donna were revealed. The revelation affected her terribly. It was all clear enough to her now. That girl before them on the stage was the one he had been about to marry in Italy. She read aright the meaning of his startled confusion and the love-light in his eyes.

Both watched Zillah with the same intensity of interest, but of the two Madeline was the more affected, for as Zillah came for the last time before the curtain the blood that had rushed to Madeline's throat and temples in an impetuous flood tide suddenly left them, and with a look of horror, as if dreading the evidence of her senses, she grew paler and more statue-like, and at last with a smothered sob fell fainting at the duke's feet.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GHOST OF HER PAST.

Your voice is silent when we meet,
But still while others talk aloud
I seem to hear your pulses beat
And see you only in the crowd.

ABSENCE had, alas! only increased Zillah's love. She knew that now, as half blind and dizzy with a thousand emotions she flung herself into her carriage and was borne fleetly away.

She loved the duke still, her passion had taken the form of a sublime constancy that had fanned her genius and enabled her to see her idol through the ideal beauty of art. Every wish, every hope had been stimulated by that fatal love.

Her separation from the duke had been the means of making her great, it had been like a death through which her ardent imagination foreshadowed the ecstasy of reconciliation and reunion.

"I shall go mad," sobbed Zillah, wan and tearless, pressing her head in her hands.

And then the wedding in the church flashed before her memory. She saw Madeline by his side as she had been to-night, his wife.

Why could she not forget and trample out her pain? His presence, his glance had removed all the old idolatry—that white, ringed hand lifted to his brow was the same hand she had touched when he lay wounded and deserted.

"Heaven help me, for I love him still," she moaned, conquered in spite of herself by nature, that is always despotic.

Zillah passed a restless night. Over-tired and thoroughly over-wrought, she paced her room hour after hour, a prey to nervous excitement. Her love, for a short space of time at least, seemed to overwhelm her with irresistible power. Passion invaded her soul and senses and she wept long and bitterly.

Why had the duke so completely abandoned her? She could of course only come to one conclusion, and that was because, finding himself poor, he had married the wealthiest girl at hand.

Zillah knew nothing of the falsehoods and subterfuge planned by Michael to lower and degrade her in the eyes of the man she loved, she never knew that he had sought her or sent her a note bidding her come to him.

They had not spared her; should she then spare them? At one time the thought occurred to her that she would leave Madeline in undisturbed possession of all for the duke's sake.

He was apparently worthless, she only cared for gold, and there was too much of the artist in Zillah to make her crave a costly entourage of servants and display; but in her calmer moments she saw the blind folly of this indifference.

Right, after all, was right. If she voluntarily discovered herself from conventional surroundings and renounced a life of gilded ease was that any reason Madeline should assume a false part and triumph by a deception?

Madeline, who had been so harsh and unkind to her as a child, now Duchess of Clydale, pretending to be a prince's daughter, taking advantage of Zillah's quixotic folly and appropriating all, should be yet unmasked.

With the return of love a consuming jealousy leapt into life. She would seek her aunt on the morrow and come to some understanding. All her past life seemed indeed, when looked at dispassionately, an absurd romance. But she would make her claim, they should find she was not to be crushed beneath their feet for ever.

"Any one but Madeline," muttered Zillah, as she vainly stifled her sobs in the night's stillness. "I cannot leave that miserable impostor undisturbed. My fate was once in my own hands and I gave it to others to wreck and ruin as they pleased."

Had Madeline succeeded to the property through the supposed death or disappearance of Zillah the girl might have passed on and left her in peace.

Zillah had a cold and measureless contempt for that stereotyped drawing-room life and society glitter that Madeline adored.

She would prefer a singer's life to all others, she cared nothing for the world; but now a new influence was at work, she wished to convince the duke as to her identity, to make him ashamed of his past treatment and abandonment. And yet at the very moment when Zillah muttered, after a fierce struggle and change of mood, "I do not love him, but I will humble his pride in the dust," she in reality confessed his power over her. When humbled and smitten might he not be her suppliant, their positions reversed, he timid and suffering and she queen of herself and of him?

Zillah ordered a late breakfast and refused to see anyone who called. She was generally besieged by visitors, but to-day, pleading indisposition, she kept quietly in her rooms.

She had ascertained from Mathias, who took the deepest interest in all concerning her, that her aunt, Lady Alesia, was still in the villa near Clydale Castle, bequeathed to her by the prince, and as Zillah was not engaged to sing for this evening at the opera she resolved to take the train and pay her a visit.

Everything seemed changed for Zillah since

the previous night; she felt frenzied, injured and humiliated.

She ordered her brougham and drove to the West End terminus, where she would take the train to Clydale, and she travelled alone. She wished none, not even Mathias, to guess the errand on which she was bent.

Soon London was left behind, and long lines of hedgerows, trees and fields met her view.

It was a splendid day, the sunlight streamed on the meadows, and the waters of the rivers that the train dashed by were calm and pulseless under the summer sky. It was a pleasant journey, but she felt chilled and solitary. She was thinking of the nightingales that sang in the Italian woods, of the dear, dead days that were gone, and of the false image her heart had enshrined. Love had come upon her like a flood of sunlight, it had faded and left only dark shadows, and through these shadows, all evil and threatening as they were, she was stretching out her hands with a half-sad, half-earnest desire to punish. He had forsaken her for Madeline, and Madeline should be unmasked; that was only just, let disgrace and shame rest on the real culprit, she had suffered enough.

Thus reflecting, Zillah arrived at the little station of Clydale, and emerging from the train she was preparing to cross a somewhat wild tract of heath about a mile from the villa when she found herself face to face with Michael. She would have passed him in silence but he would not thus be baffled, and his whole appearance was so marvellously changed that Zillah could scarcely recognise him for the same being.

"Come, don't be afraid, child," he said, in his characteristic way, "all's fair in love and war, isn't it? and I never harmed a hair of your head; besides, I think fate's using us both too well to make us enemies now."

Zillah was mystified at the change in Michael, he had a ring on his finger, he wore fashionable clothes and a "horsey" pin in his neck-tie.

"Have you had a fortune left you then?" she said, still perplexed.

"Haven't I? Yes, rather, and, what's more, my girl, I've fallen on a perfect gold mine. I can bleed 'em to any amount; I've only got to open my mouth to get thousands more."

She saw now that his face was haggard, that he had been evidently drinking deeply; good fortune had not improved Michael, he was even more objectionable than during the phases of his former hard life.

"I'm a gentleman, my girl," he went on, reddening as he saw the faint curl of her lip, "and you—you needn't sneer, because you've nothing to be particularly proud of, you know; but I tell you what, Zillah, I'll make a lady of you if you'll be my wife, as you know you once promised."

"You must be mad," she said, more and more bewildered at his manner and words; but there was anger in her eyes.

He looked at her with an awful gaze of devouring love. That beautiful, dark face, the rich olive complexion, the bright, wavy masses of hair lit by the summer sun were ever before his vision.

He mastered himself now by a supreme effort not to be ruffianly or brutal in his speech; he wished to tempt Zillah with gold, little guessing that she too was wealthy.

"And so the Georgio gave you up, he was sure to, 'tis the way with such men. But you can be revenged, my Zillah; if you marry me we can pretty well harry 'em to death."

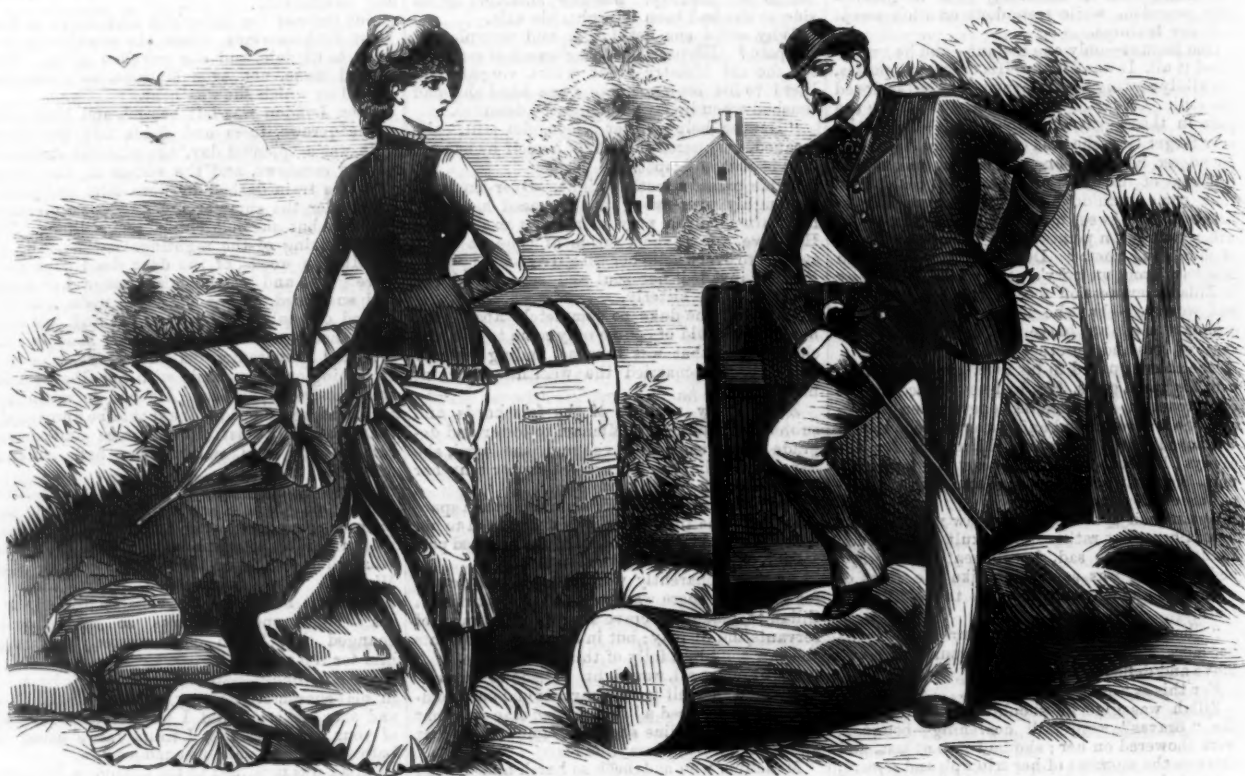
She recoiled from him with an impatient gesture.

"Never mention the word marriage to me, I would sooner die than be your wife."

"But you don't know all you're refusing. What if I'm Prince Anatole's son and heir, his lawful only son, heir to all the lands and gold? Ah, you may start and cover your face, there's a long story to be told here."

He had seized her arm and drawn her to him, but Zillah wrenched herself from his grasp.

Her next words were spoken in a low, tense way.



[FACE TO FACE.]

"It is impossible, I am his daughter."

Michael laughed and flung away her hand.

"His daughter? A fine idea. Who told you that? Even if you were—mind, I say if, for I've heard quite another account of your origin—you would have no claim, he married Thyra long before he ever visited Arabia."

"It is false!" flashed from Zillah. "A wicked, dastardly falsehood."

"Is it? Ask Thyra, ask Lady Alesia, she'll stick at nothing to keep her daughter free from any shadow of disgrace, she hasn't come to terms with me for nothing. And you, a little wild gipsy, thought you'd be Duchess of Clydale—but savagery and sentiment didn't work."

"I am the prince's daughter," repeated Zillah. "I have been silent too long, but at the eleventh hour I will strike for justice, for this is too bitter to be borne."

Michael was staggered at Zillah's assertion. Thyra had never hinted that she was the prince's child.

If so, then she was his half-sister, but he would not believe it, nothing on earth should induce him to do so.

Lady Alesia had always endeavoured to mystify Zillah as to her birth and parentage, and as the girl never saw her father, she hardly knew what or whom to believe.

But she understood now that these two, Michael and Lady Alesia, were playing into each other's hands. If Michael were Prince Anatole's lawful son, or if the prince had deceived her mother, Selika, by a fraudulent marriage, she then had no claim. It was Lady Alesia's interest to support Michael—to swear he was the heir and had divided the property with Madeline.

The whole affair assumed the aspect of a tangled net, a mysterious labyrinth.

Mathias, who had sent that female detective, the quiet woman in black, to wait upon the Duchess of Clydale, had never been prepared for this complication of matters—the prior claim of a son, to be instantly accepted as the heir were Zillah ever to appear and demand her rights.

Of home life and love she knew nothing, she never guessed how desolate her lot had been till all the affection of which her heart was capable burst into blossom under the caresses of the man who had forsaken her. Was she still to be met with mockery and scorn—denied her birthright?

Michael watched her in sullen silence. She was very pale and her large dark eyes were ringed with heavy shadows. After all, what had she lost? Position and name, and a substantial back-ground of wealth and possessions, but the love that she craved, and to gain which she would have died, had been a mere outer coating of spurious sentiment. Nothing would be worth gaining when she had that fatal evidence of falsehood and treachery always before her mind.

Her noble face had an unfathomable anguish that Michael dimly perceived. His passions and evil propensities, more than ever brutalised by drink, were slowly mastering him, and he began to hate Zillah for the bitter, miserable pain he suffered.

Without another word she turned from him and passed quickly onwards, he following stealthily for a few paces, and then, walking quicker, came again up to her side.

"Zillah," he said, with sudden violence, and breathing heavily, "we quarrelled once, but I've loved you always—it is like a miserable fever that darkens my brain. Some day the struggle will be more than I can bear."

She shuddered slightly, and put up her hands. She felt his grip tighten on her arms.

"Don't talk like that, Michael; it can do no good. You must look upon me as dead; on that dreadful night when you made me your prisoner and bound me in the tents I told you that you were a cowardly villain—I think so still."

"You'll repent that, Zillah," he said, hoarsely, and there was a look in his passionate eyes that frightened her. But with a sudden wrench she fled from his grasp, and Michael saw it would be vain to attempt to follow her.

Zillah knew he was cruel, desperate, and remorseless, that he was a man who might be

driven to work some deadly crime. Enraged, the instinct and ferocity of some wild beast might be aroused. It was not so much the words he had uttered as his looks, his scowl, and the livid, haggard face that warned her of impending danger.

But now there was her Aunt Alesia to meet, and Zillah began to recall days of the past when she had cowered under the woman's tyranny and shrunk at the sound of her footsteps.

Weary and forlorn she had sought in vain for sympathy and kindness, and a child's bitterness and despair are ever measureless, because a child never reasons.

But she was no longer weak and helpless. She must be no more set aside. If Heaven only helps those who can defy an unjust fate, she must resist and be strong. But was it worth while? Did she not despise the world and the world's codes? And then the image of Madeline appeared, languid, feted, taking her name and place—Madeline in the opera-house by the duke's side, he fastening her glove and drawing the fur-lined cloak about her shoulders.

By this time Zillah had arrived at the pretty house where her aunt lived, and was standing on the step about to ring the bell when a lady came round the gravel path and gazed at her with polite curiosity.

It was Lady Alesia.

She had just been lunching with the Dowager Duchess of Clydale at the Castle, and having settled satisfactorily with the gipsies, had ceased to dread the danger of discovery.

Who could this girl be, tall and slender, and asking for her?

As Zillah's voice caught her ear she looked startled, surprised. The clear, metallic tones were unusually resonant, and the girl lifted her veil.

"Who are you?" Lady Alesia asked, hurriedly advancing, and she looked into the girl's face—a long, anxious gaze, as of one afraid to see confirmation of a hidden dread.

"I am Zillah," she said, with quiet dignity.

(To be Continued.)



[HIS RIVAL.]

LOVE'S FIERY TRIAL.

(A COMPLETE STORY.)

CHAPTER I.

THE county ball in the famed hunting county of Lincolnshire was at its height.

There were many lovely women and brilliant girls among its gay throng. But the belle of the evening, the admired of all observers, the envied centre of admiration and homage, who had her card crowded with engagements, her notice courted on all sides, was Gladys Herbert, the niece of one of the county magnates, and a frequent guest at his house.

She was indeed most beautiful was that young, bright girl.

Fair as a lily, with a bloom like a blush rose beneath her transparent skin, with large, blue eyes that could sparkle with mirth or melt with tenderness, golden hair, that when freed from its confinement flowed round her like a veil, a lovely mouth, sweet and smiling, and a tall, graceful figure, the very impersonation of grace and lithe youthfulness, without the slender shapelessness that sometimes attends early youth.

Gladys was the belle—not of the county only, but of three counties immediately connected with each other.

Each one, perhaps, boasted loveliness among its maidens, ay, and matrons also, but still the palm alike for physical beauty and fascination of manner belonged to the fair niece of Sir Evan Stuart, and the sole ground of wonder about her was that she had not been carried off by one of her numerous admirers.

It was not even whispered that she was engaged, scarcely that any serious proposal had been submitted for her hand, and there was but one construction to be placed on such a phenomenon by the busybodies and the envious match-makers of that hunting county.

"You forget she has no money, my good friend," was the remark of the complacent mother, of three married daughters, whose united charms amounted to thirty thousand pounds. "That is a consideration now-a-days. The vulgar proverb is 'Soft words butter no parsnips,' and beauty certainly will not pay for horses and carriages, nor for pin money and parures."

"But, my dear Mrs. Somers," returned Mr. Seymour, "there are surely plenty of men to whom fortune is little or no object, and there are two I could name at this moment among Miss Herbert's admirers quite independent of such adventitious charms. There is Lord Probyn, a young fellow of certainly some twenty thousand per annum, and Alwynne Compton, with full half that sum, both apparently devoted to her, and, what is still more symptomatic, jealous rivals one to the other. The fair Gladys might do worse than accept either of those aspirants to her hand."

Mrs. Somers shook her head knowingly.

"Are they 'aspirants to her hand,' except for a dance or a dinner party, Mr. Seymour? That's my doubt. It wouldn't take much to send either of them adrift, or I am much mistaken. 'Fair-weather suitors' there are as well as 'sailors,' and they're among them to my idea."

Mrs. Somers was apt to use the "collective wisdom of nations" yeapt proverbs very largely to enforce her views, and having thus clenched her arguments she was fain to retire victoriously from the field.

Meanwhile the last-named of the two young men was at the moment whispering softly and pleadingly in Gladys's ears.

"Will you not come out on the balcony with me, Miss Herbert? The moon shines brilliantly. There is not a breath of air, it cannot harm you—do come."

The girl hesitated.

Alwynne Compton was irresistibly fascinating in air and tone and manner, albeit he could not boast of the especial gifts of nature's lavish endowment which distinguished his rival, Lord Probyn.

Still there was a speaking charm in his face, a soft, mellow richness in his voice, and unconscious intellect in every feature, that balanced the absence of masculine beauty.

Few would have resisted a request of his.

But Gladys was in that minority.

"I do not think I will, Mr. Compton. I might shiver with cold, and fill my good aunt with horror at such impropriety."

"There is not a breath of air, and Lady Stuart is in the card room. Only come—I do so earnestly ask it," he pleaded.

But either from coquetry or caution Gladys persisted.

"I cannot be treacherous. I never slip the guiding rein," she said, with real or affected gravity. "Besides, the next dance will be called presently, and I want to rest."

Alwynne Compton bowed coldly and withdrew.

His love was wounded and his pride stirred up by the refusal.

He had staked his hopes on that night's chances.

Gladys had playfully evaded or timidly shrunk from giving him a chance of openly avowing his feelings and asking her, as an honourable man should, to be his wife.

Still he hoped on.

There had been words of love and sympathy on his part, tacitly responded to on hers, and he believed that his happiness was only deferred.

The music sounded once again.

Alwynne saw her he loved so passionately in the arms of his suspected rival, Lord Probyn.

Was it from jealousy that it so seemed to him or was it a fact that Gladys looked up with arch gaiety and then bent her eyes in downcast shyness, that her head more than once touched the shoulder of her partner, and that his arm was wrapped round her as firmly as decorum would allow?

To Alwynne's jaundiced eyes there was no doubt of these maddening symptoms, and he watched the conclusion of the dance with feverish anxiety as to what would follow.

Could it be? Did his eyes deceive him? No. It was but too true.

Lord Probyn drew the hand which he had held in his arm and then led his fair partner in the direction of the bay window from which they could emerge on to the very balcony to which he himself had but now invited her.

There was no doubt of it.

The pair were there, quietly and slowly pacing its terraced walk.

Alwynne neither did nor would he have gone within earshot of their conversation. He was no eavesdropper.

It was the last measure of which he would be guilty, and in this case there was no need of it.

He could fancy it all.

The tender words which the admiring look of the young viscount betokened, the pleading for some response, the consequent acceptance, and then the announcement of the betrothal.

He could imagine the torturing truth but too well, and desired only to escape the reality of what he thus pictured to himself.

And with a hasty farewell to the hostess he ordered his cabriolet and drove home at a pace more like the going of an express train than a quiet return from a country hall.

Some hour or so afterwards Gladys Herbert stood before her cheval glass, surveying her lovely figure, while waiting farther afield a maid to be roused from the slumber into which she had fallen while sitting up for her young lady.

There was a look of triumph on her pale brow that yet lacked the placid happiness of perfect contentment.

"There can be no doubt of it now. It is all certain, and I—I have in a manner consented," she said, in a low tone that could not be audible to other ears. "I have promised, or, at least, I did not refuse when he said he should interpret my silence to mean assent. And I shall have all that heart could wish. I shall be a peeress, with a splendid name, a beautiful home; and then he loves me so much. He told me so, and why should I doubt it? I have no money—he must love me for myself, and I shall be so—I mean, very happy."

The advent of her maid stopped the soliloquy, but still her thoughts wandered on in the same channel.

The next day they should meet Alwynne Compton at a dinner party to which he had told her he was invited.

Would he renew his attempt at a private interview?

Would he guess, or would he have learnt that she was virtually the betrothed of another?

Lord Probyn would, of course, come over to lay his pretensions openly before her uncle. It would be a mere form to transmit them to her mother, and then all would be published in the neighbourhood without delay.

Gladys was excited, proud, intoxicated perhaps, at her brilliant prospects, but there was little of the softness of a newly-betrothed in her feelings, and the image of the man she had consented to marry was scarcely so prominent in her visions as that of him whom she had that evening repelled in his petition and whom it would soon be a sin to harbour in her thoughts.

Once again Alwynne was at the side of her he loved, and this time he could not be chased away from her presence, for he was placed by her at dinner, and as it so happened in the most favourable circumstances for confidential conversation, for his next neighbour was deaf, and hers too engrossed by his own fair charge to have leisure to spare for the concerns of others.

"The air became suddenly warmer last night, and Lady Stuart amiably indulgent in her relaxed rules," said Alwynne, with bitter emphasis, when the rattle of plates and knives began.

Gladys had a haughty spirit when roused, and this time it was embittered by secret self-reproach.

"If you allude to the few minutes I spent on

the balcony last night I scarcely feel bound to give you an account of my actions," she replied, proudly.

"I acknowledge it," he returned, "and yet there are some slight considerations to be paid to the feelings of others. And it was so short a time before that you had repelled my earnest pleadings for the privilege. Forgive me if I say that it was scarcely well or kindly done."

"I suppose Lord Probyn had the tact to ask me when I was in the humour," she returned, yet more galled by the well-deserved reproaches. "In any case you have no right to question my actions, Mr. Compton."

"You are right," he said, bitterly. "No, nor is there any bond whatever to control our actions. Still there may come a time when such disregard of true and honest feelings may be remembered with regret when coquetry or pride may be sunk in the desire for sympathy and affection."

The girl was silent, her heart awalled with pride and resentment, and yet she knew full well that the reproach was merited, and still more that it was too late to repair the wrong she had done.

Lord Probyn had that day had an interview with her uncle, and though Sir Charles, with the staid formality that characterised him, had referred the matter for Mrs. Herbert's decision, he had promised to report favourably as to the prospects and person of her daughter's suitor, and there could be no reasonable doubt as to the result.

Alwynne scarcely need her aught. He only saw the resplendent flush, the sparkling flash of annoyance, and the pointing lips, which were so resolutely closed from any apology and explanation, and he, in his turn, felt all the bitterness and gall rankling in his heart as if love was trying, in vain, to turn to hate.

"I understand your silence," he said. "Whether I have been a vain idiot, or you—well, I will not say the word that best expresses the women who trifle with and tacitly encourage an honourable man's deep love. Gladys, for the first and last time I tell you plainly that you have thrown away what could never have been lost by any accident of fate or fortune. May you never regret the deed."

It was the language of truth, and Gladys knew and felt it.

But she was young, and beautiful, and flattered, and dazzled by the bright prospects before her, and, above all, it was "too late."

And Alwynne turned the conversation to more ordinary topics with a composure yet more cutting than the reproach that he had poured forth.

The dinner was succeeded by a quiet dance. Alwynne stood aloof from the little throng. It was far more congenial to his gloomy mood to remain unmolested in silence and solitude. But this was not to be his fate.

"Mr. Compton," whispered a soft voice close by him, "do not look like that—it will be remarked."

He looked round, to see the plain but clever face of Lady Stuart's young cousin, Dora Grey.

The girl was a sort of ward and companion of the baronet's wife.

She was the daughter of a relative who had married imprudently, and her position in Sir Charles Stuart's household was a somewhat anomalous one.

"Why should my wayward humour be noticed?" he asked, bitterly. "It can be of no interest to anyone."

"Perhaps you are right," she said, "so far as I am concerned, for, of course, I do not count for anyone. I am 'nobody,' but then sometimes 'nobodies' have leisure to see what goes on around them."

He looked on the girl for the first time with the slightest interest, and noticed that she had a pair of exceedingly fine eyes, that were certainly the redeeming point of her unattractive face.

These eyes were bent on him at the moment with unmistakable interest and even sympathy

that was grateful to his feelings in his present mood.

"If you have observed this much perhaps you also can tell the cause of my sullen fit," he said, with an attempt at a smile.

"Yes."

"Yet you have seen so very little of me that it is almost impossible," he returned.

"Perhaps I am a witch," she said. "I am told that I am plain enough for one, at any rate," she added, half scornfully.

Alwynne was in a measure roused and interested by the proud humility of the mortifying confession.

"You may scarcely say that. With such a pair of irresistible eyes as you can boast, Miss Grey," he said, gently, "and, besides, it is only too evident that beauty is but a delusion—a snare," he went on, more bitterly.

"Here I venture to interpret what you mean, Mr. Compton?" she said, in those silvery accents that were in themselves no ordinary charm, and darting a glance in the direction of her beautiful cousin.

"You certainly may interpret," he replied, with a faint smile. "No one can prevent comments on his language and even thoughts. Perhaps even I may tacitly acknowledge that they are correct."

There was a freemasonry in his looks that gave Dora courage.

"You mean that Gladys is too beautiful, too fascinating for safety. It is no great wonder—her head must be turned by the admiration she receives. Perhaps, after all, it is not so unmingled an evil to be plain," she said. "At least, it does not harden and blind the nature, one can sympathise and—love, however needless and despised such feelings may be."

These beautiful eyes were used to no little purpose as they turned on the troubled face of her companion, and the tone of that syren voice was so little in accordance with the plainness of those homely features that Alwynne was interested by the very incongruity.

"You do yourself and me injustice, if indeed I dare apply your flattering hints to myself," he replied. "A torn heart needs balm, and mine is doubly wounded at this moment. I could bear anything but treachery. If Gladys had chosen another, and told me openly that I need not hope, then—then I could have borne what now is torture. I could have thought of her with tenderness and even love then. Now every such memory will be humiliating agency at being deceived."

"How could she? I cannot comprehend her. And for one so inferior," murmured Dora, as if speaking to herself, and a flush crimsoning her cheeks as she met Alwynne's earnest, questioning gaze.

"It is foolish. What will you think of me? I must go," she murmured, suddenly. "I see Lady Stuart is looking round—of course she wants me to fetch her something."

Alwynne watched her hurried, startled look and rapid step as she approached her aunt.

"Poor thing, it is a hard fate, and all from that accidental lack of beauty," he thought.

"And, after all, she is by no means without attractions. Let me rather have the interior loveliness than mere outside show. Poor girl, I do think, yes, it really does seem as if there was an uncommon interest and sympathy in her heart for me. Ah, if I could but see such a struggle in Gladys. But, no, no; she has no love to hide. She is cold, cold as ice and snow."

He might have formed a different judgment could he have seen the two girls as they sought their room on returning from their evening's gaiety.

Gladys was pale and troubled as she threw herself on her easy-chair and buried her face in her hands.

"Unkind, arbitrary, insolent," she muttered, working herself up to the greatest pitch of anger, that had, unhappily for herself, a still deeper and more dangerous origin. "It was all his own fault, he should have spoken before. I was not going to wait till he had thrown the handkerchief—not I. I have had an escape from a tyrant, I daresay."

But the escape did not seem very grateful to her feelings, for she gave way to a burst of tears that were certainly not all passion or resentment, to judge from their sad wail and the utter abandonment to grief of that envied fiancée, that admired belle of three counties.

Meanwhile Dora Grey was indulging in a very different soliloquy.

"Ah! I have begun well," she whispered, as she paced her room. "I could see that the spell worked, he was at once aggravated and soothed by the truths I spoke. Truths? Yes," she went on, resolutely, "they were truths. She is heartless and ambitious, and I—I love him. Yes, in my own fashion, I do—that is, I do love, and I could hate were I scorned. Only fancy, I—Dora Grey, plain, portionless Dora Grey—may win the owner of ten thousand a year, and young and agreeable and fascinating into the bargain. It is worth an effort, ay, and more than an effort. It is worth going any lengths to accomplish."

And the resolute look and tone spoke volumes as to the determination of the dependent niece of Lady Stuart to become the mistress of Compton Hall and its belongings at any cost of moral or womanly sense of the right, delicate and true.

From that day a change came over the spirits of the relations of those whose fates had been recently decided.

A cold, distant restraint marked the intercourse of Alwynne and Gladys, and yet the former seemed drawn, as if by some perverse spell, within the circle of her who yet inspired him with an irritating bitterness on each fresh interview, that was sufficiently betrayed to be visible to its object. Of course it might be the awkwardness thus cast into the once intimate relations that drove Alwynne to devote himself so constantly to Dora Grey. He danced with her, sat by her, played at croquet and lawn tennis as her partner, till at length it became a topic of remark among the gossips of the neighbourhood.

"Miss Herbert has no great cause for vanity in her successor in Mr. Compton's admiration," said a matron lady to a bachelor gentleman of her acquaintance.

"On the contrary, my dear madame. I should say that it was the greatest compliment possible," was the response. "He despairs of getting anyone so lovely and graceful, and, therefore, takes refuge in a plain, unattractive girl. It may mean that he can intend nothing but amusement by such a flirtation, or else that he has a morbid pleasure in a parody on his first love. How lovely she is looking to-night! No wonder Probyn is so persistent in his attendance, and see—Compton cannot forbear a longing glance. I am not surprised. I think she is even more beautiful since her engagement. There is a subdued thought in her face that gives her fresh charm."

"Really, Sir Charles, one would think you were in love yourself; and see—Miss Grey is just behind us in that room, she must have heard all we said."

The gentleman shrugged his shoulders carelessly, and when the lady next looked round Dora had vanished. Perhaps her presence there had been but for a few moments, and she might be spared the mortification of those unflattering comments.

Not so however.

Dora returned home with a burning, bursting spirit of hatred and indignation against the whole world, and more especially against the unconscious and beautiful object of her rivalry.

"Why was I born plain? Why is she so lovely?" she thought, with feverish bitterness. "I hate her! I hate her! Even now she retains her hold on that infatuated Alwynne, from that very beauty that will so soon vanish. Yes, they were right. I do see it, I feel it; in spite of his apparent pleasure in my society he has a lingering passion for her still. He would not care for her were it not for her beauty. Oh, if that were gone! if she could but become plain as I am he would turn from her in disgust, and I should win him to himself—once—and for life."

And the girl clasped her hands in an almost frantic exasperation at what was yet beyond her control.

"Were I to see her disfigured, dying, I would not—I swear by all that is sacred—I would not save her," she went on. "I love him—love him as she does not know how to love. She scorned him, and I would be doubly revenged were it to be visited on her. But it is vain, idle to think of such impossibility. I am not going to murder her—no, nor throw vitriol on her, according to the prevailing style of jealous rivals."

And with a scornful laugh she prepared to seek her couch.

The days and years went on, and the time that had been at last fixed for the wedding was coming, to say the least, quite within the near scope of mental vision.

The trousseau was en train. The settlements had been confided to the lawyer for a rough draft to be amended and altered if needed.

The bridesmaids were talked of if not actually invited to the ceremony, and all was progressing smoothly on the road to matrimony.

But still Alwynne lingered near the scene. It rested of course with himself whether he would not fly from the spectacle of his rival's happiness and the loveliness of the bride elect.

Dora Grey tried to believe that he was still won upon by her soothing sympathy, that he clung to her as a congenial friend, one who might easily glide into a nearer and dearer title.

Perhaps it was so; and he shrank from taking himself and his sorrow among total strangers, while she was ever at hand to listen or to sympathise in silence.

"Dear, kind girl, you seem to guess my mood by intuition," he said. "There must be some instinctive sympathy between us that you can read my heart so truly. He will be a lucky man who gains your love, Dora."

"Many a heart is caught in the rebound," was the girl's comment. "I will be patient till all is over and it would be a sin and folly to think of her; then will be my time of triumph, and, if I mistake not, my revenge on her, the admired belle of three counties, will be complete and bitter."

Those who only saw Dora Grey in her meek subservience to her guardian aunt, or in her gentle sympathy with Alwynne Compton, could scarcely appreciate that dark scowl in the brow, that triumphant sneer which crossed the firm lips as she turned away from the mirror and prepared for her usual practical duties.

CHAPTER II.

THERE is a skeleton, it is said, in every house, and his, Charles Stuart's, was no exception to the rule.

Few save his intimate friends were aware that the baronet had a son, an heir to his title and his lands, and that the existence of that son was a grief and a soreness to his soul. For Alan Stuart was a cripple, a deformed cripple from his very birth, and to his father he was but a source of mortification and tantalising irritation, and to his mother a concealed but still ever-present sorrow and care.

It was Dora's office to superintend the comfort and the amusement of this unfortunate being, for Lady Stuart was sufficiently sensitive to his dangers and his necessities not to trust his comparative helplessness to the mercy of those who might be tempted to neglect one at once unpleasant and incapable of attending to his own wants.

And Gladys Herbert was frequently a visitor to the apartments of her afflicted cousin, to whom her presence ever appeared to be a bright sunbeam in the darkness of his gloomy lot.

"Where is Gladys? Is she not coming to me to-day?" was his constant plaint to Dora on her entrance to his room, and perhaps this fresh proof of the winning fascination of her beautiful rival, even in so insignificant a quarter, added

gall to the indignant grievances that rankled in Dora's breast.

"I do not think it likely. She is engrossed now by someone else," she would say. "You must remember that she is going to be married, and, of course, she only thinks of Lord Probyn and has no time for anything else."

"I hate him," returned the youth, sharply. "I hate him. I hate anyone who keeps Gladys from me and makes her love him. If I had been different, if I had been like others instead of this poor, deformed object, I would have married her. She could not have refused when I should have loved her so well," he added, in a tone of deep pathos that only stirred up the revenge of the jealous hearer.

"Well, it is a very safe idea, at any rate," she said, smiling, "considering it can never be tested. I know you may rest assured that she does not bestow a thought upon you now, and very soon she will be gone altogether, and I don't suppose you will see her again, so you may as well banish such absurdity from your mind."

Alan's pale brow flushed with the pang the words gave, but he had an instinctive insight into Dora's nature, in spite of her enforced attention to him, and he said nothing for the moment.

"There is no company, no gaiety, to-night, is there?" he returned, at length.

"No, only Lord Probyn and one or two at dinner. It will be quite an early night after all our late dissipation."

"Then I am sure she will come, at least, to bid me good night," said Alan, sadly; "she never misses, and she may not do so many times more. I shall not go to bed till she comes. Will you read to me, Dora?"

She dared not refuse, and, taking up the volume she had been reading to him, began her task.

But as the time wore on she had the annoyance of perceiving that the attention of the listener was distracted from the subject, and that he was watching eagerly for every sound that betokened the breaking up of the family party and approach of his favourite cousin.

She dared not comment on this inattention, for she knew full well that Lady Stuart would never forgive such torment to her afflicted son.

At length the welcome signal was heard. The distant opening of a door and the rustle of female attire were sufficient indications of the approach of the fair syren, and Alan's eyes brightened with joy.

"She is coming. I knew she would. Dear Gladys, she never forgets my repulsive self," he murmured, all unconscious that he was speaking audibly to his companion as well as to himself.

But she had neither the time nor courage to remark on the persistent devotion of the hopeless admirer.

The door opened and Gladys entered with her bedroom lamp in her hand.

She had never looked more lovely in the ideas of the cripple or, perhaps, to the unwilling confession of Dora herself.

Her simple white evening dress shimmered and floated around her like a fairy's robe. Her lips wore the smile that they always gave to the afflicted one—tender and cheering to his gloomy existence; her eyes looked like stars in the subdued light—and her golden hair had escaped from its confinement and showered over her shoulders like a picture setting.

"I am late, Alan, dear. I scarcely thought you would sit up for me," she said, gently, "but to-morrow I shall come and sit an hour or two, and sing and read and talk to you. I shall not be here so very long, you know."

The youth pressed her soft hand in his thin fingers.

"Gladys, I shall be so miserable when you are gone. But, oh! I do trust you will be happy. You will, will you not? No one could be so wicked as to hurt you, Gladys, or be unkind to you."

There was a quivering in the girl's lips as she replied, with affected lightness:

"Oh, no, of course, silly boy. I bear a charmed existence. However, I am not afraid. I shall have as much happiness as most people."

I have been spoiled perhaps, and shall have to learn some wholesome lessons by adversity," she went on, with half-real, half-affected playfulness. "But good night, my dear boy—I really must go to bed. I am sleepy."

She stooped down to kiss him as she spoke. Her lips touched his brow with tender, softest caress, that was like a breath of Paradise to the suffering cripple.

Another instant and there was a sudden light—a blaze—a scream—that was reflected by a cry of terrified agony from Alan's lips. Gladys was on fire! Her light evening dress had caught the flame of the lamp she held, and the sleeve and bodice were soon in one brilliant, dreadful atmosphere of light.

Alan was powerless to move. His very throat was parched with the agony that paralysed him.

And Dora—what of her?

Was it the fell purpose of her heart or was it the remembrance of her cruel, wicked vow that numbed her limbs and kept her motionless to call or help in that dire necessity?

One effort on her part in the first moment of danger might have averted the calamity.

She might have thrown the heavy table-cover, or the wool rug that lay before the hearth, over the shrieking, terrified girl, and stopped any further progress of the flames.

But she abstained, either from powerless stunning of the faculties, of mind or body, or from some more wicked and deliberate purpose.

In any case the same result followed.

Gladys fled in wild, ungoverned terror to the door, where the breeze of air naturally added to the virulence of the flames, and cry upon cry in increasing shrillness came upon the air.

"Dora!—Dora!—get help. Ring—call—if you would not see me die before your eyes!" wailed Alan, piteously.

And at last the rigid form of the girl did burst from its strange spell, and Dora walked to the door, with a strangely ejaculated cry for help.

It had come already, though, alas! as it seemed, too late.

Sir Charles Stuart had been aroused from his evening smoke by the shrieks, and rushed to the assistance of the sufferer.

The thick dressing-gown was closely wrapped round her, and then a mat snatched from the landing-place completed their extinction. Gladys was freed from her terrible atmosphere of fire, but, alas!—alas! she could scarcely recognise the relief to her burning agony. In a few moments more consciousness mercifully forsook her, and she had a brief reprieve from suffering.

All was, as may be imagined, horror and dismay. Servants were hastily summoned, a message sent off to the nearest doctor, and the sufferer placed on a couch, though they dare not attempt to undress her till the arrival of the surgeon.

Little comfort was to be deduced from his opinion.

Miss Herbert was in imminent danger. It was doubtful whether her life would be spared, but no hope could be entertained as to any preservation of her beauty, for which she had been so distinguished.

"You must be thankful," concluded Dr. Mervyn, "if you keep her with you, Lord Probyn. It is next to impossible that she can ever be less than moderately disfigured; but to a lover's eyes that will be soon forgotten."

And the good-natured doctor took his leave, after giving some special directions as to the treatment of the invalid.

"I will not intrude on your hospitality any longer, Lady Stuart," observed Lord Probyn, as the morning dawned on the troubled household. "You will have so much that is painful to do and to think of. I shall, of course, inquire daily as to Miss Herbert's state."

"Miss Herbert."

It was a strange, cold title, but still there is a wide difference between persons' habits in such cases, and it might be simply the custom of the young nobleman to reserve more intimate appellations for his beloved alone.

So Lady Stuart persuaded herself as she received the parting salute of her future nephew.

It was some twenty-four hours or more ere Gladys Herbert fully returned to the consciousness of her situation.

Poor girl; there she lay, a pitiable object, her beautiful hair so scorched and shrivelled that it was only common policy and humanity to cut it off. Her neck bandaged in the soothing liniments that were to be applied on each opportunity, her eyebrows gone, her whole expression of face altered by the disfigurement and the pain.

She had not spoken for some time—indeed her strength was too much exhausted for power of any kind to be left to her.

But at length she signed for her aunt, who was in attendance on her sick bed at the moment, to approach, and feebly whispered:

"Tell uncle to come—I want him."

In a few minutes Sir Charles was at her side.

"Uncle, tell him—Lord Probyn—he is free. Even if I live it is all over now."

The baronet tenderly bent over her.

"No, no, dear child; wait. It cannot be, he will not listen to it. It is too rash and sudden. Time will develop the result," he said.

"No, no, no," she said, in her terror. "I cannot rest till it is done. Please tell him."

And Sir Charles was fain to comply, lest it might aggravate the feverish symptoms in the sufferer.

Still he could not doubt the response to the message with which he was charged on the young nobleman's daily visit, and if he watched the features of his listener during its delivery it was rather that he might report to his niece the eager, generous indignation of the lover than any fear as to the effect it would produce.

There was a slight pause.

Was Lord Probyn at a loss for words strong enough to vent the love and tenderness of his heart?

He spoke at last in somewhat hesitating accents.

"It is very sad—very painful, Sir Charles, and it is even more so from the fresh proof of the right feeling and generosity of my late betrothed."

"Your late betrothed?" repeated Sir Charles.

"Yes, my dear Sir Charles; you can scarcely feel surprised if I find it expedient—necessary, I may say—to accept your niece's dismissal. The position in which my future wife will be placed is so public and conspicuous, and her duties will be so entirely painful to her under the sad consequences of this catastrophe, that I feel it is best for her as well as myself to accept her dismissal, however severe the trial may be to my feeling. She and you may rest assured that I can never again expect to find a bride so charming and suited to my tastes. But we cannot control circumstances where it is evil fate that presides over our destiny."

Sir Charles could ill restrain the passion of scorn and anger for the lover and pity for his suffering niece that boiled within him.

But he knew that it would compromise the dignity of the fair heroine of the tragedy to betray his astonishment and contempt, and he only replied, coolly:

"I accept your assurances, Lord Probyn, and I think it extremely possible that you may repeat them yet more strongly in future time than the present. At any rate, I consider you are more deserving of pity than my niece herself under the circumstances."

He rose with a resolute air that at once gave Lord Probyn his congé, and then he returned somewhat fearfully to the chamber of poor Gladys.

"Uncle, what does he say?" she asked, feebly.

"My darling, he is not worthy of you. Do not distress yourself on his account," returned Sir Charles.

A faint smile parted the parched lips.

"I am content, it is best. Do not speak of it again," she said, and then closed her eyes wearily in sleep.

"Compton, have you heard the news?" asked the bachelor, Mr. Seymour, who had so resolutely asserted Miss Herbert's charms on the night of the ball that had proved so memorable in her story.

"No," was the languid reply, as Alwynne reined up his horse to listen to the gossiping old gentleman's last tit-bit of scandal.

"Why, Gladys Herbert is nearly burnt to death—that is all. I fancy there is very little hope of her recovery, and they say her beauty is gone for ever, or, rather, it is nearly certain she will be a perfect fright. Poor thing, it is scarcely to be desired that she should live, the change would be so desperate for her."

Alwynne's hands trembled on his reins, may, he well nigh reeled in his saddle, as he listened to the abrupt communication.

"What—what—how?" he fairly gasped, as soon as he could command his voice.

"Oh, it was in bidding good night to Stuart's crippled son, you know, the lamp caught her dress, and, of course, he could do nothing, poor fellow."

"And was no one else there?" asked Alwynne.

"Yes, Miss Grey, but she seems to have been fairly bewildered. She did nothing, and the poor girl ran wildly about, making matters worse, till some came with more sense or strength or something."

"Idiot, coward," came from between Alwynne's closed teeth, then he said, more collectedly, "What does Probyn say? I suppose he is half mad and in close attendance on his betrothed?"

"No, it is all off. Some say it was her doing and some his, but there is no doubt of the facts. They have parted, and I expect he only waits in decency till she is out of danger to leave the neighbourhood for a time. It's very awkward, of course."

"Very," was the curt reply.

And then with equal abruptness he turned his horse's head from the direction Mr. Seymour was taking.

"Good day; I have just remembered an engagement," he said, and rode off at a brisk pace.

"Humph! he's like the others I suppose, afraid of being caught. Poor girl, it's a sad contrast. Lovers will fly off by dozens."

And the old gentleman trotted soberly on his route.

Meanwhile Alwynne Compton increased his speed when he was out of sight, and he took the next turning which led to the picturesque residence of Sir Charles Stuart.

"Is Lady Stuart at home—I mean can I see her? I will not detain her long, but I have urgent business," he pleaded, as the servant hesitated whether to admit anyone to the house of mourning and anxiety.

But he knew Mr. Compton well, and he had a shrewd idea that the ill-concealed agitation in his countenance was connected with the sad event that had thrown them all in such confusion and consternation.

"I will see, sir, but I doubt whether my lady can see anyone," he returned. "Please to walk into the breakfast-room."

The brief suspense was rewarded by the sight of Lady Stuart herself, with a rather reproving air.

"Mr. Compton, it is very kind of you to come in person," she said. "I do not doubt what brought you, but poor Gladys—"

"No, Lady Stuart, I do not think you do guess what has brought me," interrupted Alwynne, eagerly. "It is to see her—Gladys. I must, indeed I must. I will not leave the house without a glimpse of her, in your presence, and one word, if it is but one."

The lady looked as if she thought him mad. "Lady Stuart, I implore, I demand—it is the right of the love I bear her and have so long borne, though it is only now that I dare to in-

dulge or confess it, since—since I lost her. Have pity—let me see her," he pleaded, eagerly.

"But, my dear sir, it will but distress you. It is a painful spectacle. You can scarcely be aware of what you ask. Gladys is terribly disfigured, and—"

"My dear Lady Stuart, I shall but look at her. It will not be worse for me than you, and how much less than her suffering. Let me go. I will, I must."

And his impetuous pleading at length gained its way, and Lady Stuart reluctantly and fearfully led the way to the patient's chamber.

Alwynne did not wait for his presence to be announced ere he was at the bedside, his hand clasping the fingers of her uninjured hand that lay outside the bed.

"Gladys, dearest, best beloved, forgive me this intrusion. But how could I keep away from your side when I knew you to be suffering? Gladys, you know how I have loved you. You repelled me, you preferred another, but now—now that you are once more free—now that you are suffering and sad—you are a thousand times dearer to me than before. Oh, can you give me hope—can you consent to be mine—to let me watch over you and soothe you in all your pain and your sorrow?"

The words were poured out like a torrent, but yet in those soft, melting accents that touch the heart, and certainly Gladys was in the very condition and mood to be the most sensitive to its power.

But it was but for a few minutes that she permitted herself to feel the spell of the tender accents, the pressure of the hand, the looks of love that lingered on her disfigured features.

"You are good and generous, but it cannot be," she said. "I was ungrateful, vain, blind when I was more worthy of your love. You shall not be burdened with such a frightful creature as I must be. No, not even to even to gratify your generous sympathy. It has soothed me, dear Alwynne. Now go, and forget me if I live, and think of me if I die."

"I will not, I cannot, Gladys. It was you and not your beauty I loved. You are the same, nay, perhaps yet more worthy of my love than before. If you can return that love, if you can be happy with me, then I claim you as my wife."

It was a strange wooing on that bed of pain—wooing of one who at the moment was more like a victim than a betrothed—a tenant of a coffin than a bride at the altar.

Still Alwynne persisted with as ardent and as tender pleading as he could have used to the belle of the three counties, and in the end his own and Lady Stuart's arguments prevailed. Gladys felt, perhaps, that she had indeed sacrificed the substance to the shadow, that the man she had chosen was base and selfish, with but a surface love for her beauty and a pride in winning the admired of all observers. Now it was different, and her eyes were opened, and her heart perhaps awakened to its real instincts.

"Alwynne, it is as if I accepted your love when rejected by others. How can I degrade you thus?" she answered.

"If I thought that, my beloved—if I had not faith in your truth—I could not covet so much your dear hand," was the fond reply. "If you trust me as truly and deeply there will be little fear that one regret or suspicion can mar our future."

"If I live," she answered, faintly, "if I live." Yet she felt as if such love could snatch her from death itself.

But even happiness and affection cannot remedy the ravages of so fearful an agent as remorseless fire, and for weeks and months the life of the suffering girl hung upon the hazard of a die. The agony of pain and the exhaustion of system that were consequent on the shock threatened to conquer the earnest efforts of those around to rally her from the weakness and nervous tremor that shook her to the very centre.

And there was one who secretly, anxiously, fensively, hoped for a fatal end to the ordeal.

"She must die—she shall. Why should I

have sinned in vain?" she murmured to herself, as she restlessly paced her room in the intervals of her duties. "She is a fright—a repulsive fright, and yet he is infatuated by her. It is not her wealth. She is poor. It is witchcraft—spells—that keeps him as her captive. She, who deserted him for one nobler and richer, and has been jilted by that triumphant suitor. And yet he himself kisses the ground beneath her feet. Oh, it is torturing—unbearable. It is past all the besotted idiocy of the weakest of men. Ah, me!—ah, me! If I did but know the secret—if I could but gain such power!"

Alas for the ungoverned girl. She did not comprehend that the whole secret of such power was love—true, deep, unchanging love—only such as is but rarely felt, and which, once felt, is never recurrent twice in the human heart.

There had been a long consultation in the library of Sir Charles Stuart, in which he and his lady and the doctor who had been in attendance on Gladys took part.

But when it was over Alwynne Compton was summoned to the conclave.

"Mr. Compton," said the long-trying and experienced medical attendant of the young sufferer, "Sir Charles wishes me to convey to you our united opinion that it will be better for you to leave this neighbourhood for a few weeks or even months on Miss Herbert's account. Are you willing to undergo the probation?"

The young man flushed angrily.

"Is this some scheme to divide us, or do you doubt my truth and sincerity, Sir Charles?" he asked, haughtily.

"To divide you for a time, certainly," returned the baronet, calmly. "It is for the best. It is, for her sake and yours, more satisfactory than for you to remain near her—to become so accustomed to her appearance that you forget its peculiarities, and will be subject to sudden spasms of annoyance and perhaps repugnance if it is recalled to you by any chance circumstance. If you follow our advice, and leave her for a time, you will meet her again with a full notion of the truth. I shall not fear then for her happiness or yours."

Alwynne flushed angrily.

"Sir Charles, it is an insult to your niece and myself to doubt this," he said. "It is really not her beauty that I love—that I have always loved. I decline such an unworthy test."

"Then I decline in her mother's name and my own the consent to her marriage," was the firm response. "We are not disposed to risk what it would be too late to amend. Come, come, Compton, be a man. It is not for you to wonder at our feelings after the late episode, and assuredly if you do not fear yourself you need not fear in the interval."

The young man chafed and resisted, but there was an element of truth and sense that he could not gainsay in the argument, and on condition that he was to be allowed to correspond with his beloved, and that the wedding was to take place as soon as he returned to his native place, he consented to the probation that he believed so needless and took a long farewell of his afflicted fiancée for six weary months.

Dora Grey was waiting in the park by an apparent accident to see him depart.

"So you have been once more the victim of your own generous truth, dear Mr. Compton," she said, sadly, "and I—and I am powerless to warn or save you. Ah, if you did but know your own true interests, if you did but appreciate those that—I mean those who are your true friends."

"I do not understand you," he said. "I have only too ample proof that there is only too much fear and reluctance on the part of both my Gladys and her friends to trust my constancy and affection for her. If they would consent I should willingly marry her as she is now and have the pleasure of watching over her restoration to perfect health."

"Probably," said Dora, bitterly, "but as they are tolerably sure of your honour, if she always remains in her present state, and as a yet more eligible suitor may present himself in any other case, I do not see that I am in the least too

suspicious in my views of their meaning. And I," she said, sadly, "I cannot bear to see you thus played upon. I, who would devote my whole life to—to one I loved."

The young man looked at her with grateful sympathy. A suspicion of the truth flashed across his mind.

"Dear Dora," he said, softly, "if—if—such treachery were to happen, then, indeed, I should know and repay the regard that has watched for me and warned me. But—no—it is impossible, you will be the first to rejoice at your mistake. Farewell; we will, I hope, meet at the altar in happier days."

Dora's lip curled as she turned away from the farewell.

"At the altar," she muttered; "yes, it may be so. We may yet meet at the altar. But in what fashion time will show."

Nine months passed away and there was no sign of change or flagging in the correspondence between the lovers. The date was fixed for the return of Alwynne Compton to his home and to his love.

Gladys had written him one brief but forcible letter as the last expression of her feelings ere their meeting.

"ALWYNNE, I implore you, if you love me, if you value our future happiness, that you will be frank and candid with me when you see me again. If I am not such as you can love and present to others with pride and safety, let our engagement be broken. I can bear that, but not to bear one glance, one word that could seem like regret at our union. As you love me, believe and remember this, Alwynne."

And the answer was:

"As true as that I love you, Gladys, I will."

Now the important moment was at hand.

Alwynne did perhaps feel a slight throbbing of the heart, an over-anxiety lest some unconscious look or gesture of his might excite the sensitive suspicions of his beloved.

The door opened that was to admit him to her presence and he hastily passed in to meet—whom?

Not the disfigured, scarred girl he had left, and whom he truly loved, but one so like the Gladys of former days that he could hardly have discerned the difference at a first glance, though possibly a closer inspection would have revealed the traces of the terrible suffering she had borne.

In truth Gladys had so lovely a skin, and the injuries to her face had happily been of so much less severe a character than to the other parts of her body, that little if any trace remained on her beautiful features, while her eyelashes were longer and the expression of her eyes softer and more winning than before.

In truth much of the physical beauty remained and the mental loveliness added to it a new charm.

Alwynne clasped her to his heart with the exclamation:

"My darling, I wish I had found you less beautiful that I might better have proved my true love."

A week or two later and the faithful lover led to the altar his well-won bride.

But Dora Grey was not there.

She was lying in her chamber, the victim of ungoverned and selfish passion, and in the ravings of delirium she betrayed the secrets of her evil heart to the astonished and horrified Lady Stuart. And it was only at the earnest pleading of the happy bride that she was permitted to remain in the home she had well nigh made desolate.

If the eye of a water-newt, as well as some other animals, be entirely destroyed and removed, another will grow within a twelvemonth and as good a one as the first. The arms and legs of human beings will not renew themselves when once lost, but lobsters are more fortunate in this respect.

BRIDGED BY HIS LOVE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Clotie Cranbourne," "The Golden Bowl,"
 "Poor Leo," "Bound to the Travel,"
 "Fringed with Fire," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXX.

LORD DUNMOW'S WOOING.

LADY HILDA STAINES had not been particularly happy through the autumn and winter. Nothing had happened as her fair ladyship had planned it to do, and this in itself was exasperating.

Harry Harcourt had not harnessed himself to her chariot wheels. He had not accepted her favours or her liberality, proffered through her father, and yet he had been inconsiderate enough to succeed without her help. Also while being polite and friendly and even sympathetic with regard to many of her schemes, he had very carefully kept aloof from the influence of her personal charms, and he could never at any time have been seriously regarded in the light of a suitor because he never even pretended to sue.

As I have said, all this was very provoking, and it became still more so when Lady Hilda ascertained that the real cause of her own failure lay in the bright eyes of her successful rival, Rosalind Redesdale.

Lady Hilda was a queer compound of extreme vanity, extreme susceptibility and extreme political and social opinions.

Of course one would not presume to hint at such a thing in her presence, but there can be little doubt that personal vanity was at the bottom of all her eccentricities.

The pleasure of directing public affairs, of hearing herself spoken of as a leader and of pulling the strings that made other people fulfil her behests, added, it must be confessed, to the secret delight she felt in shocking and even outraging the musty opinions of her elders, had carried her along in her perverse and headstrong career.

Of course Lady Hilda had many suitors. An heiress is seldom without them, more particularly so when wealth is allied in the same person with rank and beauty.

But she had not smiled on these aspirants to her hand, and Lord Dunmow, whom of the number she liked best, had received but scant encouragement.

He had verbally been invited down to Dacre Park for the skating. This vague invitation, however, had not been followed by anything more definite, and though the young man had written two or three notes on one pretext or another to Lord Dacre and to Lady Hilda, no definite invitation to the park had been given him.

Lord Dacre was, in point of fact, getting very weary of his daughter's freaks and oddities, and much as he would have liked to see her married to Dunmow, he had not the very faintest hope of his wish being gratified.

"She will end by being the leader of a clique of objectionable, self-assertive, noisy and mischief-making women who, because men won't marry them, go about reviling everything and everybody," he remarked one day in disgust. "Hilda will be their champion, she will make herself prominent at public meetings, speak from the platform and exhibit herself as altogether odious and unwomanly. However, I cannot control her. I am about to enter upon a second marriage for my daughter's sake, and if the influence and companionship of a cultivated, elegant woman like Lady Hilda Marmion fails to have a beneficial effect upon her then I shall regard the case as hopeless."

In this way his lordship endeavoured to evade his own responsibilities by shifting them upon somebody else's shoulders, while he tried at the same time to acquire a certain amount of

admiration for self-sacrifice, when in reality he was only following his own inclinations.

The announcement of her father's intention and his engagement, however, came upon Lady Hilda like a thunderbolt.

At first, as I have said, she protested, and promised, and entreated. Then she lost her temper, and told her father he ought to be ashamed of himself to think of marrying again at his time of life, and finally she vowed that directly a new wife came into her father's house she would walk out of it.

All of which was very exciting, and occasionally dramatic, but it had no effect whatever upon her father's resolution.

He had gone so far that he could not draw back, and he secretly congratulated himself upon the fact.

That he had proposed and been accepted was indubitable, and it was likewise clear that something very much more serious than his daughter's opposition would be required to justify him in breaking the engagement.

Those who knew Lady Hilda Marmion best cynically pitied the poor peer who was seeking refuge from the mild tyranny of his daughter in the tender mercies of such a wife.

But Lord Dacre knew nothing of this. Despite his past experience he looked forward to unalloyed bliss in the future, and waited, with even more impatience than did our hero, for his wedding-day.

That day was not far distant, and in the interval Lady Hilda had to make up her mind as to what course she would pursue.

No one attempted to persuade her—no one showed the least inclination to coerce her.

Lady Hilda was diplomatic enough to be conveniently blind and deaf to the snubs which her future step-daughter tried to administer to her.

"Let her laugh who wins," was her astute ladyship's remark. "I shall have ample opportunity for returning these little civilities later on."

But Lady Hilda was very miserable for all her show of spirit and of temper.

The world she had so long lived in seemed to have crumbled away from her.

Her theories were very interesting toys to play with and experiment and speculate upon, but when she talked about the independence of women she never realised that this theory put into practice meant that Lady Hilda Staines should leave her father's house and go and live alone.

She could understand going away with a husband, though she had lately been opposed to marriage as degrading to woman.

She had thought she could enjoy a life of independence, with some old woman for her companion, but she found it a very different thing to struggle for social freedom when others sought to hold her back, and to assume and take the consequences of independence now that she was left to her own devices.

She was in this frame of mind one afternoon within a fortnight of her father's approaching marriage, when Lord Dunmow called and was admitted to her presence.

He was still the same big, handsome, heavy-looking Englishman as of old, but he was particularly nervous to-day. He had come to tempt fate, and he was not by any means certain that fate was in a mood to be tampered.

At first he talked somewhat aimlessly about politics and about the new prima donna, but Lady Hilda answered vaguely and abstractedly, and he, feeling she was paying no heed to what he said, relapsed into an awkward silence.

This silence was broken by Lady Hilda, who said, sarcastically and bitterly:

"I hope you have not called to congratulate me or yourself upon the circumstance of our families becoming connected through this absurdly ridiculous marriage that is to take place soon."

"No," he replied, promptly, his courage rising with the opportunity; "I came to ask you to make the connection closer still by becoming my wife."

He had said it at last, and he blushed like a

big school-boy as he somewhat timidly clasped one of her listless hands.

"Become your wife," she repeated, doubtfully, making no effort to withdraw her hand from his grasp.

"Yes; be my wife!" he urged, passionately; "you know that I love you, Hilda. My greatest ambition is to spend my life in making you happy."

"Do you really love me?" she asked, half dreamily.

"Do I love you! Have I not proved it as far as in me lay by going into Parliament, and by devoting myself to hard work? Don't you remember, Hilda, that you said you could never love a man who did no earnest work and who had no definite purpose in life? I took your words to heart, I thought you had a motive in saying them to me, and from that time I have been a worker instead of an idler. Is not this a proof that I love you?"

She smiled, half reluctantly, half tenderly; then she said, in a doubtful, desponding tone:

"It was very good of you, and I am grateful for the proof of esteem which you give me, but if I were to accede to what you ask, if I were to consent to be your wife, you would expect me to settle down to the humdrum life that other women lead; you would have a horror of anything like advanced opinions or independent action, and you would expect me to obey you more meekly and more unhesitatingly than a paid servant."

"Oh, Hilda, how can you talk like this?" asked the infatuated young man, indignantly.

"Simply because it is true," she replied, withdrawing her hand and slightly shrugging her shoulders. "I should become one of your goods and chattels, and among many things that you would expect from me is obedience."

And she rose to her feet and walked away a step or two, as though to express her disdain.

"All I will ever ask of you is complete love and confidence, Hilda," replied Dunmow, also rising; "be my wife, darling, and you shall have your own way in everything. I will never attempt to thwart or control you in the slightest degree, your own good sense and your own pure heart will always keep you from doing what is either foolish or wicked, and I will always try to help you in your efforts for the good of your sex and in the furtherance of everything in which you take an interest."

"You really will?" she asked, pausing and looking at him fixedly, though she allowed him to regain possession of her hand.

"I will; I swear it," he replied, pressing the fair hand to his lips.

"You will let me attend meetings on behalf of Female Suffrage without making a scene at home each time I go?" she asked, calmly.

"I will, and I will even attend the meetings with you if you will let me."

"Yes, I should like that; but you promise solemnly to leave me free to act upon my own judgment in everything in which I am individually concerned, provided I consent to marry you."

"I do, my darling! I will be the most obedient of husbands, but don't make marriage such a bargain, Hilda; tell me that you love me, and that you will be my wife because you love me."

His appeal touched her.

Under all her vanity and absurdity she had a heart, and now she smiled a mischievous, tender, loving smile as she said:

"You foolish boy, if I didn't love you a little bit do you think I should care to tease you so?"

I must decline to describe Lord Dunmow's raptures, or to tell you how very demonstrative he was in expressing his affection; suffice it to say that when he at last took his leave he had not only obtained Lady Hilda's consent to marry him but had actually arranged with her the day upon which the wedding was to take place.

"I am of age," said the young lady, decisively, "and therefore I shall do as I like. I won't have any settlements, and I don't mean to have papa's consent asked. He didn't consult me, and I don't see why I should consult him."

"But, Hilda," pleaded Dunmow, "think of the dear old man's feelings if we keep the matter from him; I shouldn't easily get over it if I were he, and my only child got married without even telling me till it was over; and after all, dear, your father won't have a bed of roses when he is married to my Aunt Mabel."

"Well, no, that is a comfort in its way," was the laughing reply; "so you may tell him if you like, but mind, Dunmow, this is not to be taken as a precedent. You must not always expect me to make concessions remember."

Dunmow's reply was to clasp her in his arms and kiss her tenderly and passionately. He saw clearly enough that Hilda would be by no means hard to manage; she would seem to do as she liked, while in reality she would be led by him.

"Just like those clever women," exclaimed her father when he heard his daughter's decision on the subject of settlements, "they talk of their rights and their wrongs, and have no more notion of business than so many babies. The idea of leaving your fortune completely at a husband's mercy."

"If I can trust him with myself, I can surely trust him with my money," was Lady Hilda's retort. And, turning to Dunmow, she added, "I can trust you with both, Lawrence."

(To be Continued.)

FACETIÆ.

A "SCREW" OF TOBACCO.—The man who grudges you a cigar. —Punch.

TOO TRUE!

THE COLONEL: "What I suffer from is neglected education."

SIR GORGIVUS MIDAS (whose main regret is that he was never at a public school): "Neglected education? Why, ang it; you were brought up at Eton; weren't you?"

THE COLONEL: "Yes—that's just it."

—Punch.

A "GOOD TURN."

He (pulling up short): "I say, isn't that Jack Sparkes and Nellie Sweeting coming round by the road there?"

SHE (unsuspiciously): "I think it is, dear."

He: "Then suppose we take the lane, eh? It's a bit further, but—(magnanimously)—'Spoons' don't care to be interrupted, you know."

SHE (innocently): "Don't they, dear?"

—Punch.

NEW NAME FOR IRELAND.—The Green-Acre Island; late Emerald Isle. —Punch.

SCENE.—Hotel in Cologne.

FIDGETY ENGLISH PARTY: "There seems to be quite a commotion in the hotel, Kellner."

KELLNER: "Ja wohl! De drain has chust gom in, krite full!"

(Fidgety party, who is not yet accustomed to the German way of pronouncing English, is aghast.) —Punch.

THE REAL HERO OF CARS.—The winner of the balloon contest. —Punch.

HOW THEY READ IT:

FRENCH Republican motto—Liberty, Equality, and No "Fraternity." —Punch.

OLD LADY (to modest curate): "Eor, sir; I do like to hear you preach extempore—your language is that won'erful fluid!" —Punch.

"NEAT" SPIRITS.—A "tidy" drop of whiskey. —Fun.

CONNUBIAL WHEEL.

Love does a great many things—it makes the world go round, and rules the universe generally, but love never scrubbed your best meerschaum pipe with hot water and soap to clean it and take the smell out. Oh, no, that's not love. It's revenge. —Fun.

TRUE GENEROSITY.

SMALL BROTHER: "Where did you get that sweetstuff from, Annie?"

SMALL SISTER: "Mother gave it to me."

S. B.: "Ah, she always gives you more than me."

S. S.: "Never mind; she's going to put mustard plasters on us when we go to bed to-night, and I'll ask her to let you have the biggest." —Fun.

THE "MARINE MAN-DRAKE."

PLYMOUTH is about to celebrate the tercentenary of the famous voyage in which the leader was at once "Drake" and "dux," and gave his brave crews a chance of making "ducks and drakes" of the contents of the Spanish treasure ships they captured. —Fun.

THE DIRECT CUT.

ENGLISH TOURIST: "Can you direct me to the General Post Office, my man?"

DONALD: "Ou aye, sir. Gang straight round about, and straight farret, and ye canna miss it." —Fun.

SHAMEFUL!

"What's most like a bird playing cricket?—A crow batting (acrobating)." —Fun.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Not much as a rule, but sometimes a great deal that is funny, thus:

A clergyman who was tried for bigamy, and consequently what would be called a bad man, possesses the cognomen of "Good."

A young man sentenced at Lambeth to two months' hard labour for stealing was by name "Blessed."

At Chertsey a man detected in the act of setting fire to a dwelling house is surnamed "Cawte."

At Hammersmith a burglar who was committed for trial was a Mr. "Steel."

A man at Durham convicted of theft pleaded guilty, and stated his crime was brought about by betting, he having lost. His name was "Winn." —Fun.

TIP FOR GOAT-FLESH EATERS.—See you always have "kid-knee" potatoes. —Fun.

THE RULES OF CONTRAST.

THE VICAR: "Well, Mrs. Smith, tell your husband that I do hope he will come to church next Sunday."

MRS. S.: "Ah, you don't know Smith, sir. E'd never goo if I told 'un that there! I'll tell 'un as you do 'ope as 'ee want!" —Fun.

GET ALONG, DO!

Good old port wine is said to be meat and drink to some invalids. In such cases is it the crust that is eaten and the wine that is drunk? —Judy.

THE LAND QUESTION SETTLED.

HOME RULE ORATOR: "My honourable frind proposes to abolish the landlords; but, gentlemen, the innocent recreations of the people must be preserved, an' if you have no landlords who are we goin' to shoot?" —Judy.

TWO YEARS AFTER.

You have not changed, my Geraldine;

Your voice is just as sweet and low,

You are as fairy-like in mien;

As four-and-twenty months ago.

Since Hymen tied the fateful knot

I've basked within your glances' beam;

Your beauty has not dimmed a jot,

You realise a poet's dream.

A poet craves for boundless love

And beauty of the first degree;

I'd do with less than that, my dove—

I'm much more moderate than he.

The gleam from dark-fringed eyelids

sent,

The witchery of tone and look

I would forego to some extent,

My Geraldine—if you could cook!

—Judy.

THE Brighton lodging-house keeper's aspiration during the season—Let us prey. —Judy.

WEIGHT A BIT.

CUSTOMER: "What's the farthin' for?"
BAKER: "Profit, to be sure; the bread's rose."

CUSTOMER: "An' time it did; it's been heavy long enough." —Judy.

WALKING THE PLANK.

OUR JEMMY was a born carpenter. Saw? You should see him saw, see him see-saw too. His imagination even soared as high as Mr. Coxwell's balloon. Plane? There wasn't a plainer boy in the parish! Chisel? I'll say nothing on that matter. The way he'd chisel is a saw—no, I mean sore—subject in the family.

One day he came home dragging a long plank behind him.

"Gracious goodness!" cried mother, "what ever's the child got there? What is it, Jemmy?"

"A twelve-foot plank, mother."

"And how ever do you think that's going to get into the house?" she asked.

"On its twelve feet, o' course," answered Jemmy.

Mother left him alone after that. —Judy.

AND HE COULDN'T HELP IT.

SHOEBLACK: "Twopence, sir, please!"

ASTONISHED CUSTOMER (with large feet): "Twopence! Why every body else only charges a penny."

SHOEBLACK: "A penny for two feet, sir. But twopence for two yards." —Moonshine.

THE CO(p)YRIGHT OF CENTURIES.—A hummy.

—Moonshine.

JACK FROST is a veritable peace-maker to Ireland. Already he is causing the out-door agitators to "wrap themselves up in their thoughts." —Moonshine.

THE PECULIAR PEOPLE.—Avarice, old maids and bachelors. —Moonshine.

BE-HEALY NOW!

PERSONS who regard Ireland as being desperately wounded by sedition, and who advocate coercion, are pointing gleefully to the fact that the very first arrest made by the Government was Healy in effect. —Funny Folks.

A PEASANT PROPHET.—The self-naming noble of old Russia. —Funny Folks.

MATERNAL FORETHOUGHT.

(The "blushing bonnet" is the latest contrivance of the fashionable milliner. Springs are brought to bear on the temporal arteries by the action of bowing the head, and an artificial blush is the immediate result.)

MAMMA: "We had better call on the De Hautcrusts, darling."

PASSER DAUGHTER: "Yes, mamma. Shall I wear my Tam O'Shanter?"

MAMMA: "I think not, love. We shall meet Lord Cubechester; and as the dear fellow has already paid you marked attention, he might, you know— At all events, it would be wiser if you wore your blushing bonnet." —Funny Folks.

IMPORTANT TO EGG-OTISTS.

It has lately been discovered that the skin of a boiled egg will cure boils on the skin of a human being. The egg must be peeled, and then kept "on the boil" for several hours. —Funny Folks.

OH, SNAKES!

"Tea fascinates its victims," says a medical journal, "and ends by crushing them." Oh, quite the "Bohea-Constrictor," then, it would seem. —Funny Folks.

A DIS-LOCATED MAN.—An evicted tenant.

—Funny Folks.

A BAD SIGN.

WHATEVER may be the advantages of education, it reduces one to a level with his fellow-citizens. In olden times a man more often made his mark than now. —Funny Folks.



[THE SPELL OF BEAUTY.]

AT CASTLE-PAIX.

I was lying on my chair-couch, which had been wheeled into the bay window to give me the benefit of the sun and the flowers, when Rose came to me with an open letter in her hand. Her cheeks were flushed and her fair face aglow with delight.

"Oh, Twistie," she cried, "what do you think? Here is a letter to mamma, from Dolores, and such a sweet, kind letter it is; and Dolores wants all the hard feelings of the old trouble put away and forgotten; and she is coming to see us, and asks us to try and love her a little, because she is so lonely. And, oh, Twistie, I know I shall love her, for just see what a sweet picture she has sent me, her own precious sister, as she calls me."

The dear child knelt by my side and put one arm under my poor, twisted back—the back that had caused me to nickname myself in a way that had now become universal in the household—and with her free hand she held the handsome bit of porcelain and gold before my eyes.

From it smiled sadly the strangely incomprehensible face of Dolores Angel, the unknown, half-sister of my little niece, Rose.

I looked upon it long and earnestly. It drew me against my will; it held my gaze, fascinated with its mystic bronze beauty. I could not say that I liked the face. I felt an over-

whelming repugnance to the idea of her coming among us and disturbing the almost heavenly peace of Castle-Paix; and yet, as I gazed upon the rounded outlines of that face, I yielded to an unaccountable impulse, and suddenly pressed my lips to the indescribably sweet mouth.

"Oh, you love her already, Twistie, just as I do; don't you, dear? How glad I am that she is coming; that she is willing to forgive and forget, as the good book bids us. I have grieved over it, in secret, for years, Twistie, to think my only sister was an alien and an exile from her people. Yet, of course, while poor papa lived, it had to be. Ah! there comes Ronald, and I must run and tell him the good news."

After she had gone I lay back on my couch, with a strangely heavy feeling at my heart. We were all so happy at Castle-Paix; our household was so complete, the atmosphere so peaceful, and our relations so tender and close, why need this foreign element come among us to create disturbance?

For disturbance I was certain must ensue. What is perfect can change only for the worse. Her name alone signified sorrow.

"Dolores, our Lady of Pain," I repeated, and then laughed at myself for an ill-tempered invalid.

"After all, she is half-sister to Rose," I said, "and it is but natural the child should feel some desire to see her. Yet, she was well enough off in Germany among her own people, and why not stay there?"

Yes, she was half-sister to Rose. Adrian

Angel married Margareta Von Weimer, the only daughter and heiress of a German philosopher, who claimed to be descended from the nobility, while a student at Heidelberg. He had brought her to England, and had taken her to the home of his lady mother and sister. But this German princess, as she called herself, was not content, and so, upon the shores of a beautiful river he had built Castle-Paix, under her direction, and some said with her money, and furnished it in sumptuous fashion. Here, after six months of married life, her father came, and bore back to Germany his princess daughter. She had written him to come for her. "She hated England and English," she had said, "her husband not excepted. And she wanted to go back to Germany, where she never need look upon an English face again." And back she went.

Six months of married life with his German princess had quite reconciled Adrian to this proceeding. He made no attempt to detain her. He shut up Castle-Paix and went into lodgings in London, where he busily pursued his profession—the law—and to all appearances was as happy as men ordinarily are.

After a few months some tourist brought word that a daughter had been born to Adrian's wife, over in her German home. But Adrian did not exhibit the slightest interest in this event. He set about procuring a legal separation, and in time was a free man once more.

After a few years he married again. This second venture proved more successful. I had every reason to love his memory, for he was invariably kind to me, the poor invalid sister, and dependent of this new wife. Our mother had died when I was but eight years old and Mercy but fifteen.

From that day to the day of her meeting with Adrian she took care of me as tenderly as if she were my mother, supporting us both by teaching school. Then Adrian saw her and loved her for her sweet face and white soul, and made her his wife and bore her off to Castle-Paix and me with her. There we dwelt in such peace and happiness as few mortals know for twelve beautiful years. Then Adrian died, leaving Mercy and me and Rose, his eleven-year old daughter, the very counterpart of her mother, to mourn for him.

Seven years had gone by since then. The keenness of our loss was tempered into the sacredness of a remembered sorrow, and life again smiled upon us.

Rose was a beautiful creature of eighteen, betrothed to a very prince of men, young Ronald Vaughan, and Mercy, like all young and beautiful and wealthy widows, had more suitors than she could smile upon; and while she was gentle and womanly and reserved with all, I had grown to think of late that her cheek flushed a trifle when Captain Argyle's step sounded in the hall, or when his name was announced; and of all the people who came and went on social terms at Castle-Paix none had so bright a smile or so kind a word for poor Twistie as brave Captain Argyle, who had left his strong right arm in India.

A rarely handsome man he was, of goodly height and strong of limb and broad of chest and shoulder, and the blue of his eye was like the sky of an autumn day, and the chiselled beauty of his face reminded you of some marble statue of the olden gods. Forty years had not taken the music from his laughter or the warm light from his bonny eyes.

I could not help thinking what a handsome couple he and Mercy would make. Mercy was thirty-six, and her beauty seemed just at its height. When she and Rose stood side by side it was like looking upon a beautiful bud and a full-blown blush-rose. They were alike in form and feature and colouring and speech—only that Mercy was ripened and matured, a beautiful enough woman to make any man's heart stir, to say nothing of her wealth. And Captain Argyle was no fortune-hunter, he had princely domains of his own. What with his splendid beauty of person and his polished manners and his record of honour, he could have chosen

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any lady in the land. If he sought my sister in marriage it was, therefore, for herself alone.

You can understand now how happy and bright life was for us at Castle-Paix, and how I well might dread the intrusion of an element as yet unknown and to me unwelcome.

While I lay there upon my couch, thinking it over, Mercy glided across the carpet and came and knelt beside me.

I fancied there was a slight shadow upon her white brow and a troubled look in her soft, hazel eyes.

"Have you seen Rose?" she said.

"Yes," I answered, "and I am not at all pleased with the information she brings. We are so happy here, Mercy, why need that foreign girl come to disturb us?"

I think it was a relief to Mercy to hear some one put into words the feeling she was striving to subdue. The shadow left her brow and she laughed a little, but quickly sobered down.

"Hush, Twistie," she said, reproachfully. "We ought to be willing to receive the poor girl. Her grandfather and her mother are both dead, and it is but natural she should wish to see the only near blood-relation she has. Rose is her sister, you know."

"Yes, but she had better wait and invite Rose and Ronald to Germany, on their wedding-tour. I am sure we do not need her at Castle-Paix."

"I know it, dear," my sister answered, very gravely. "But you must remember that Castle-Paix, according to general belief, was built by her mother's money, and that really, in equity, it belongs to Dolores, and not to us. Perhaps she is aware of this fact, and does not deem herself an intruder."

I was silent for a time, and I fear a little sullen, as people non-plussed are apt to be.

"Oh, well," I said, at length, "we will try and make it pleasant for her if she comes. But I hope she will change her mind and stay at home."

Mercy rose, laughing lightly.

Now that she knew another dreaded the coming of this unknown girl she could better mask her own nameless fears and make light of the matter.

"You are a spoiled child," she said, "and I fear you are growing selfish with too much comfort. I don't know but it will be a good thing for you, if this girl does form a disturbing element."

Then she kissed me, and went out humming the strain of an opera air.

It was just two weeks later that I was sitting on the east verandah, watching the shadows lengthen over the water and the land, when Rose sprang up with a little gasp.

"On, Twistie, she has come," she cried.

Sure enough, a carriage had paused at the north gate, a lady descended and came slowly up the winding walk.

Rose ran to meet her, and the stranger threw back her veil, and from my chair I caught a glimpse of a bronze face, lighted by lustrous eyes, and then the two vanished through the north door. But even to where I sat a strange, subtle odour floated that half intoxicated me as I closed my eyes and drank it in.

Two hours later, as I lay half-asleep in my nook, just off the drawing-room, a corner which I had chosen for my couch, because there I could enjoy the music and conversation of the social evening at Castle-Paix, yet not be seen by everyone, that subtle odour stole over me again, and stirred me with that curious sense of delicious pleasure. I am passionately fond of perfumes, and they exercise a powerful influence upon me. I associate people with perfumes, and never forget where, when, and upon whom I have detected a certain odour; and so long as I shall live a waft of that peculiar fragrance which hung about Dolores will bring back to me all the tragic events of those strange days, as fresh as if they had occurred but yesterday. Bring with it too that almost passionate longing for a sight of her face and touch of her hand which, despite myself, I cannot conquer.

"Twistie," said Rose, gently, "are you awake? Dolores has come."

I opened my eyes and looked up into the wonderful face that bent above me—wonderful, not so much from its rich beauty as from its peculiar colouring. Hair, eyes, and skin were of a beautiful brown hue, varying only in degree, the eyes darker than the hair, the hair darker than the face, and the cheeks and lips burning with a vivid red, like the colour on ripe fruit. A strange, rare, warm, wondrous face it was; and as it bent above me I felt the same indescribable impulse I had felt toward the picture; and reaching up my arms, I drew Dolores down and kissed the perfect mouth.

Her warm lips clung to mine lovingly.

"Thank you, Twistie," said the sweet, strong voice. "I think you are all so good to me—an alien and a stranger."

She sat down by my couch, and talked to me of her journey; and I closed my eyes and listened, and drank in the subtle perfume that breathed from her presence. When she rose and went into the drawing-room to join Mercy and Captain Argyle and Ronald, I felt a loneliness and loss, as if something very dear had gone from me. But so long as I could hear her voice, or breathe the perfume that was a part of her presence, I was content.

Rose came to me after the family had dispersed to their rooms that night and the guests had gone and poured forth her rhapsodies in my willing ear.

"Isn't she lovely, Twistie?" she said. "Aren't you glad she has come? Oh, I love her already, with my whole heart—love her as if I had always known her. Mamma says she thinks she is beautiful; and Ronald, even Ronald, who hardly ever says anyone is pretty but me, declares she is very fascinating. I was so afraid Ronald wouldn't like her, for he was prejudiced, you know, and he hardly ever likes brunettes. But I think they will get on famously. I hope she will never go away, but stay at Castle-Paix for ever!"

Truth to tell, I was already beginning to dread the thought of her departure. And she had been at Castle-Paix scarcely five hours.

Before a fortnight had passed she was as much a favourite with the whole household as with me. "Dolores, the Lady of Pain," had become "Dolores, our Lady of Joy." Rose adored her; Ronald made her a sort of confidant and adviser, and looked upon her as some goddess of wisdom and goodness; and Captain Argyle, while he rarely spoke with her, often followed her with his eyes, and once confessed, after I questioned him, that he thought Miss Dolores "a rare type of a peculiar style of beauty."

Mercy, who, I fancied, harboured the old style of prejudice a little longer than the rest of us, yielded at last to the fascination of the new comer, and the two became fast friends.

"I don't know how it is," Mercy said to me, one day, "I feel an actual intensity of love for Dolores when I am with her; and yet when I am out of her presence I often find myself wishing she had not come. But I think it is only my selfishness that prompts the wish. Of course, she has interfered somewhat with our old cosy relations; but she gives me so much pleasure I ought to be willing to give up some few things."

I thought I understood what Mercy referred to. She missed the cosy morning chat and evening ride with Captain Argyle. His calls were quite general now, for, of course, during the first weeks of the stranger's presence in the house she was asked to take part in all the rides and calls and pleasures of the household.

Someway, as the weeks wore into a month, matters did not resume their old position. Captain Argyle and Mercy rarely saw each other alone, though his calls were perhaps more frequent than ever.

One day I was lying in my nook, and Dolores was sitting beside me, engaged on some bright wools that she was weaving into a rich mat. Captain Argyle had dropped in for an informal call, and had found mercy in the front drawing-room. We could hear their voices, but could not see them. Quite by accident, Dolores let fall a large ball of her rich wools, and it

rolled out of sight into the front drawing-room. A moment later it was brought back by Captain Argyle and laid in her lap.

"I knew it was yours," he said, as he bent his blue eyes upon her. "Everything you touch is redolent with a peculiar perfume that I should recognise anywhere. It almost intoxicates me."

Then he too felt the influence of that perfume. I looked up at Mercy, who had joined us, but she was picking a dead leaf from a plant by the window, and I could not see her face.

From that hour, however, I knew of the pain in store for her. There was no mistaking the expression I had seen in Captain Argyle's eyes as he looked at Dolores. From my own feelings I knew how mighty that power was. In all my poor, twisted life I had never known such an all-absorbing emotion as Dolores had awakened in my heart. Her touch, glance, tone, or a waft of the perfume she used, stirred me with the most exquisite delight.

I pitied Mercy from the bottom of my heart, and yet I could not blame Captain Argyle for his infatuation. Nor could I see that Dolores had made any effort to win him from my sister. It had simply followed as the natural consequence of her presence in the house.

She had been with us just three months when, one night, an unexpected revelation was made to me. We had enjoyed an unusually merry evening. Captain Argyle, Ronald Vaughan, Mercy, Rose, and Dolores, with one or two other casual callers from the neighbourhood, had all gathered in the drawing-room, and made the hours gay with song, anecdote, and laughter. I had never seen Dolores more bewitching. I noticed that she sat by Rose or Mercy nearly all the evening, and I thought how brilliant the contrast made her. She glowed like a ruby beside a milk-white pearl, and Mercy seemed faded beside her. Captain Argyle had been more open in his admiration than ever before. He scarcely took his eyes from Dolores, and when he told an anecdote it was for her he told it, and after one slow, upward glance of her bronze eyes he seemed content.

At ten the circle broke up, and Dolores herself gave me my crutches and helped me to my room above. I disrobed and tried to sleep, but the sultry August night was so oppressive I could not rest. At last I slipped on a loose gown, and taking my crutch, crept slowly down to my couch, off the drawing-room, for I fancied the long room might afford a freer ventilation and sleep be more possible.

I soon fell into a slight slumber, from which I was woken by hearing voices near me. It was the peculiarly high-keyed voice of Ronald Vaughan that was speaking.

"It was perfectly maddening to me all the evening," he said. "If you had not granted me this interview I believe I should have gone home and blown my brains out."

I heard a low laugh, and a murmur of words that sounded like "Poor, jealous boy."

What did it mean? Had Ronald and Rose been having a lovers' quarrel, and, if so, of whom was he jealous?

"Jealous," repeated the man's voice again, "and what did you think I would be, to sit and see that old idiot smiling and beaming upon you all the evening, and never receive a glance from you myself. I felt like strangling him and shooting myself."

Again that low, half-mocking laugh, and this time the words were quite indistinct. I heard the name of "Captain Argyle" and my own spoken once or twice. Then there was the sound of rising, of kisses, and Ronald said, quite distinctly, "Good night, my darling—bless you for granting me this interview—I can live now till I see you again."

Then there was the cautious closing of a door, and then a woman's dress brushed by my couch, and as the figure glided away up the long winding staircase over me swept a wave of that intoxicating fragrance which I knew so well.

It was Dolores whom Ronald had called his darling, and he was jealous of Captain Argyle.

My heart fairly seemed to die in my breast as I lay there through the long night and thought

matters over. Poor Mercy, poor Rose, poor Ronald, poor captain! I pitied them all, and myself with them. Yet I could not bring myself to censure Dolores, as I knew she deserved to be censured. I was so completely fascinated by her that I seemed to be deprived of my own strength of will.

But before morning I regained control of myself, and had resolved upon a course of action. I did not have an opportunity to follow it, however, until the next evening. Dolores and Rose had gone off on some picnic excursion when I awakened, and did not return until nightfall. As soon as I had an opportunity I whispered to Dolores to remain with me after the family dispersed. Neither the captain nor Ronald made appearance, and Rose and Mercy went to their rooms before the lamps were lighted. Then with Dolores's hand in mine I began to speak.

"I overheard you and Ronald last night, Dolores," I said. "I came down here to sleep and heard you parting. He kissed you and called you his darling. Do you think you are acting honourably toward Rose?"

I felt her hand tremble. For a moment she was dumb with astonishment. But only for a moment. She was collected and calm enough when she made answer.

"If Rose cannot keep her lover," she said, "is it my fault? How can I help his loving me if he will?"

"You could very easily hinder it if you tried," I answered, with considerable warmth. "He is your sister's betrothed lover, and so should be sacred to you. I have not blamed you in regard to Captain Argyle. Though you must have seen he was more than a friend to my sister when you came, I could understand how he might be fascinated by you without your aid. But Ronald was so attached to Rose, and she loves him so—and loves you; and I think you are unwomanly and cruel to repay her devotion in this way. Rose is your sister, Dolores; you must remember that."

I saw her eyes burn like two coals of fire through the gloaming. Her breath came hard.

"Yes," she said, "I do remember that she is my sister, Twistie. I also remember that she is the child of the man who utterly ignored my existence. He was responsible for my being—yet he never was known to speak of me or in any way seemed to know I lived."

"Whatever the wrong-doing of my mother, my father had no right to abandon his own child as he did. From my earliest childhood I harboured a desire for revenge. I knew that in England was Castle-Paix, built by my mother's money, and that there dwelt my father's wife and his child, the woman who had robbed me of my father's heart."

"If he had never married again I believe his heart would have called for me in time, and I could have more than recompensed him for my mother's failure. But he died without speaking my name. Then I resolved I would wait until his daughter was grown and I would go to England. Meantime my mother died. I had money, but I was homeless and desolate. I was born into this world with a craving for love, and, fortunately, a faculty of winning it. I never tried to win the heart of man, woman, or child, that I did not succeed."

"I came to England, determined to win the love of my sister, my father's wife, and of all that belonged to them. If my father's wife had married, I meant to make her wildly jealous of her husband, even as I had been jealous of my father's love for her. If my sister had a lover, I meant to win him from her, even as she took my father's heart from me. Fate has been kind, and made the play more pleasing than I anticipated."

"Captain Argyle is a grand man, and it has been more honourable, and quite as interesting, to win my father's wife's lover than if he had been her husband. Yet the play was a little dangerous, for when he pleaded for my heart and hand yesterday I found myself trembling with a strange pleasure. It would be easy to love Captain Argyle."

She paused, and I broke in, excitedly:

"Then why not allow yourself to love him," I

cried, "and become his wife? He is noble, handsome, wealthy. I think Mercy has conquered herself now and knows that he is lost to her. He his wife, Dolores, and cease trifling with hearts."

She laughed her low, mocking laugh and said:

"But what will I do with Ronald? He loves me quite as well, in his way, as the captain does."

Before I could answer there was a step near us, and a form darkened the starlight that streamed in through the long window.

"Ronald will withdraw from the play," said a strangely broken voice, which we knew to belong to Ronald himself. "Thank Heaven I have heard the story from your own lips, Dolores," he continued, coming forward, "for I would have shot down any other who dared tell me what you have told. You are quite right—I have, I do love you quite as well as Captain Argyle can. But I have a will and manhood enough to exert it. I am going away for a little while. Tell Rose, Twistie, that I called in, after she had retired, to say I was obliged to be absent, on business, for a few weeks. For Heaven's sake, don't let her know what a villain I am. When I come back I will be braver, and she shall name the day, if she will, for our marriage. Heaven forgive you, Dolores. Good bye."

His shadow vanished from the starlit space, and he was gone.

Dolores rose and sighed wearily.

"I am so tired, Twistie darling," she said, kneeling beside me for a moment and burying her beautiful head upon my shoulder. "I am so tired of life, of love, of everybody. Why was I ever born, Twistie? I am good for nothing, only to make people love me, and then trouble is sure to follow. But you will always love me, dear, won't you?"

"Always, come what may," I cried, and I knew that I could keep my promise.

She glided away, and I lay thinking until almost dawn.

I was so glad Rose was to be spared a great sorrow; I could not bear that she should suffer.

But I was anxious—nay, eager—that Dolores should accept Captain Argyle. It would keep her near us, and prevent the possibility of her returning to Germany. Mercy, I believed, had fought her battle.

Rose was full of wonder and sorrow at Ronald's sudden departure, but not a doubt of his honour shadowed her sky. I was thankful for her trust and for the chance that had spared her a bitter knowledge.

Ronald had been gone just a week, and Captain Argyle's suit seemed to gain favour daily, when one evening there was a ring at the bell, and upon us, as we sat, Mercy, Rose, Dolores, and I, a stranger was ushered in—a very distinguished-looking stranger, with a wonderful moustache and immensae blue eyes and the blondest of blonde faces.

Dolores rose with a little startled cry, and the stranger came forward and lifted her hand to his lips, with the utmost ceremony, and greeted her in German.

Then Dolores turned and presented her friend with the unpronounceable name, and he bowed elaborately and addressed us, in German again.

"My friend is a fine English scholar," Dolores explained, in an undertone, "but unable to speak a sentence of the language, which he reads with ease. It will make it awkward for us, but I will not act as interpreter. He will understand you, if you speak slowly and distinctly, but he will only be able to reply through me."

A very delightful state of matters indeed for Captain Argyle, when he called an hour later.

The moustached foreigner could understand every word he uttered to Dolores, while not one word of their conversation was the captain able to comprehend.

The captain made his adieux early, in consequence, with a shadow in his eyes.

"Be of good heart," I said, as he came to my nook to say good night. "I believe your chances are bright."

He pressed my hand and gave me one of his rare smiles as he turned away. All his great heart seemed to shine in his eyes as he gave one last glance toward Dolores.

Imagine my dumb consternation when Mercy came to me the next afternoon with the intelligence that there was to be a quiet wedding at Castle-Paix in a day or two.

"Dolores is going to marry that German fellow," she said, "whom it seems is an old lover and a member of a very distinguished and old family. He has followed her here, and she has made up her mind to repay his devotion. They will be married at once, and go direct to Liverpool and sail on Saturday. Isn't it a romantic termination of our dear little friend's visit? How we shall miss her!"

But Mercy could not conceal the relief she felt at this unlooked-for dénouement. As for me, my heart seemed turning to ice.

I do not know how long I sat in a perfect stupor of pain when Dolores crept up to me. She was very wan and almost haggard. She twisted her arms about me and rested her head upon my shoulder.

"I am going to leave you, Twistie dear," she said, softly.

But I cried out sharply, interrupting her: "Oh, don't! How can you do it—how can you?"

"Because it is best," she answered. He came over to find me, and I used to love him—I think I do love him now. And he is my own, and I make no other life desolate by keeping him, but glorify his. Without me he would never be happy, he has loved me so long. And I think everybody at Castle-Paix will be more at rest and happier after I go away—everybody but you, dear. But then if I stayed it might be that you would have a lover, and I should make you jealous, because you lived at Castle-Paix. I swore vengeance on all its inmates before I came."

The little laugh that rose to my lips at her mention of a possible lover for poor, miserable me turned to a sob, and I wept out a little of my lonely sorrow in her arms.

Only a little. It lay too deep to be dissipated in tears.

While we sat there Captain Argyle was shown in.

Mercy was in the front drawing-room, and detained him with her old, sweet, pretty air that had returned to her all at once. He sat down beside her for a moment, and I heard the murmur of their voices.

The captain had seen us, and smiled and bowed brightly, before he sat down by Mercy. His face was sparkling and his eyes full of light.

But half-an-hour later, when Mercy was called out and left him, and he rose and came forward to where we sat, he looked old and haggard, and like a man who had passed through some terrible ordeal.

"I wish you all prosperity," he said, giving his hand mechanically to Dolores. "Mrs. Angel has just informed me of the happy event to take place very soon. I trust you may be happy."

"Thank you," Dolores answered, quietly, but she did not look at him.

"I hope you may favour us with your presence," she continued. "There are no other guests invited, but we shall expect you."

I thought she was terribly cruel, and felt sure he would decline.

But he accepted, and came.

He came and stood by my couch, and held my hand while the solemn service was performed that divided him for ever from Dolores.

I think he read the admiration and wonder in my face as I watched him standing there so handsome and brave, for he leaned down and whispered:

"Young recruits, like Ronald, run away from battle; but old veterans, like me, face the cannon."

"I understand," I said; and we never spoke of it again.

Dolores did look at him once. I think she did

not dare to trust herself. In an hour she had gone for ever, and we were alone.

Ronald came back after a few weeks, and before the winter holidays. Castle-Paix was gay with the wedding festivities of our darling Rose. She made a bonny bride, and has been a happy wife. She and Ronald remain at Castle-Paix; and the patter of their children's feet sound through the hall.

Captain Argyle comes and goes, as of old; but only as a friend, not as the lover of Mercy. I think Mercy knows and understands the truth; but the knowledge that he will never marry any other contents her with her own lot. She has the good taste never to mention Dolores in his presence, and I think he is grateful.

Ronald proves a model husband, and Rose thinks herself the most favoured of wives. Not long ago he sat by my couch with his youngest child upon my knee. Suddenly his little boy came running to us with a bright antimacassar in his hand.

"See, auntie, what I found in your room—in a box; why don't you put it down in mamma's parlour?"

It was woven out of bright wools, and had been a gift from Dolores. With everything else that reminded me of her I had put it away in my room where no one else could see it.

Ronald had never seen it, therefore. But I saw him start and turn deathly pale as he through the room floated that remembered perfume.

"For Heaven's sake," he said, in a low, trembling voice, "send that boy away, Twistle, with that accursed thing."

I hurried the child off and followed him slowly on my crutches. Poor Ronald, he is brave to hide so well the old wound that is not even healed. How could I dream that he had forgotten her? Once having loved her, it were impossible to forget that rare creature, Dolores. As for me, she is, with all her faults, the one perfect memory of my poor, thwarted life.

Sometimes I lie awake at night and weep tears of longing for her and dream of a day when I may perhaps see her again.

And so the years go by at CASTLE-PAIX.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN LICENSED VICTUALLERS AND INNKEEPERS.—A case of considerable interest to licensed victuallers was recently decided by the late Chief Baron Kelly in the Court for Crown Cases Reserved, and his decision was concurred in by Justices Denman and Manisty, Field and Huddleston. The circumstances of the case were so definite as to make it of value as a test case in future. A person living within a few hundred yards of an hotel demanded refreshments at a bar attached to the hotel, belonging to the proprietor, and conducted under the same licence. The attendant at the bar, by order of the landlord, refused to serve the applicant, who, after three refusals, indicted the landlord at Quarter Sessions, and got a verdict against him. The landlord appealed. The Chief Baron said the place in question was under the same roof as the hotel, but was entirely separate from it, with a separate entrance, and appears to be a mere shop in which spirits are sold over a counter. In such a place no one has a right to insist on being served more than in any other shop.

SNAKE-BITE.—Considering the terrible fatality of snake-bite in our Indian and other possessions, it is satisfactory to hear that Dr. Stradling, of the Royal Mail Company's steamship "Elbe," believes that he has discovered an antidote. His first experiment was rather an eerie one for his fellow-passengers, if not for himself, for he brought a large cobra at Bahia, conveyed it surreptitiously on board ship, and shut himself up with it in his cabin. Having there secretly provoked the creature to bite him, he took his remedy, and though only just recovering from a state of coma when discovered, declared himself to be "all right." The captain made him promise not to repeat the attempt, and he desisted till the vessel reached Rio Janeiro, when he went ashore, saying that he must try it once more, and, if he did not

appear on the morrow, his friends might guess his fate. He came back to them well and flourishing, but would not reveal the secret, which he is reserving until he once more reaches England, when he intends to publish the results of his investigation of the poison of venomous snakes and the means of counteracting it.

A MAIDEN'S FATE.

The grey of the sunrise brightens o'er
A babe that smiles on its mother true,
While a rose-bush buds at the cottage door,
And the winds are up from their bath of dew.

"Oh! the buds are breaking," the mother says;

"And the winds are blithe from the pearly gate;

And there's nothing sweeter in time or place
Than the dawn of life in a maiden's fate."

The morning melts o'er a little child,
Who romps in glee at the cottage door,
Where a rose-bush opens in the worship wild
Which the winds of the morning around outpour.

"Oh! the buds have broken," the mother sings;

"And the winds rejoice ere it be too late;
And there's nothing in all bright, joyous things

Like the morn of life in a maiden's fate."

The high noon smiles on a happy girl
At her lover's side by the cottage door,
Where a rose-tree's blossoms their petals curl
In the warm wind's kisses that wander o'er.

"Oh! the roses are blooming," the mother sighs,

"And each zephyr chooseth a rose for mate;

And there's nothing sweeter 'twixt earth and skies

Than the noon of love in a maiden's fate."

The sunset flushes a joyous bride,
From altar returned to cottage door,
Where a rose-bush gleams in its after-pride,
While the day-winds droop on the twilight's shore.

"Oh! roses," mother and lover sigh,

"Bloom brightly still, and ye winds, pause late;

For there's nothing now, or in days gone by,

Like the fulness of life in a maiden's fate."

The moon looks down on a new-made grave,
That may just be seen from the cottage door,
Where a rose-bush withers, and night-winds

crave
Some tears of dew for the gone-before.

Nor mother nor lover a word can speak,
But the stars breathe low as the night grows late,

"A brighter boon ye can never seek
Than the angel-life in a maiden's fate."

N. D. U.

STATISTICS.

THE United States of America have this year reaped 480,000,000 bushels of wheat, which is the largest produce ever known. This will leave a clear surplus for export of 180,000,000 bushels, which would more than meet the requirements of the whole of Europe.

THE amount of butter exported from New York during the year ending June 30, 1880, was 31,061,610lb., valued at 5,179,071 dols. In

the same period there were 10,833,320lb. of oleomargarine exported, valued at 2,581,317 dols. The butter averages sixteen and three quarters cents per pound, and the oleomargarine a little over thirteen cents.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PICKLED CABBAGE.—Select solid heads, slice very fine, put in a jar, then cover with boiling water. When cold, drain off the water, and season with grated horseradish, salt, equal parts of black and red pepper, cinnamon, and whole cloves.

SALLIE'S BISCUITS.—Three good-sized potatoes boiled and mashed fine, one tablespoonful sugar, one-half pint boiling water. When cool add one cup yeast; let it rise till light. Then add one quart of water and flour to knead. Knead half an hour, and set it to rise light again before baking.

OLD DUTCH WAFFLES.—Take one quart of milk, one quart of flour, two eggs, one tablespoonful of butter, a very small portion of yeast. Beat the eggs separately, and let all rise from four to six hours. Heat the waffle-iron; grease the iron with melted lard. When the waffles are baked dip in melted butter and hot water. Have sugar and cinnamon beaten to eat with it.

MACARONI PIE.—Ingredients: Any cold fish, macaroni, milk, butter, grated cheese, bread-crumbs and cayenne. Mode: Boil some macaroni very tender in milk, about twice as much as there is cold fish, which should be broken into very small pieces; mix with it the grated cheese and cayenne; put into a flat dish with a few bread-crumbs and some pieces of butter at the top, and bake a light nice brown. Any fish will do for this dish.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ON Wednesday, the 3rd instant, Consols changed hands at par—the first time they have done so for twenty-seven years. In 1853, before the Crimean War, transactions took place in them for a while at 101.

THE Princess Olga, the youngest daughter of the King of the Hellenes, died at Athens, on the 1st inst., after a few days' illness.

OTTO, the son of a Mr. Perot, Indian Chief, is now astonishing the world at San Francisco, on his way to London. His talent as a sharp shooter is unrivalled, surpassing anything ever yet beheld. One of his great feats is that of hitting a mark blindfolded. A glass ball is suspended twenty feet away, and the boy is allowed to gaze at it. Then his eyes are bandaged, and he is turned around several times; but he usually breaks the ball, though how he manages his aim is a mystery.

THE late Mr. Fechter's wardrobe was sold by auction in New York a few days since. It was expected that the relic-hunters would have given extravagant prices for the different lots, but the hope was not realised. The costume for the first act of "The Duke's Motto" sold for £2 12s., while the Mexican dress worn in the last act of that play was knocked down for £4. The black Hamlet dress, with chain and picture, was purchased for £2 8s. Two cream-coloured cloth cloaks, worn in "Othello," fetched the same sum. The beggar's dress in "Rouge et Noir," said to be the last Mr. Fechter ever wore upon the stage, was purchased for a guinea. There were over a hundred swords sold, some that had been used by anyone, but which were bought by him some years ago for the purpose of stocking the Lyceum Theatre. There was some competition for the "Ruy Blas" sword—Mr. Fechter's favourite, the auctioneer said—and it was knocked down for £3.

CONTENTS.

Page	Page
VERA'S VENTURE ... 97	MISCELLANEOUS ... 119
SCIENCE ... 100	CORRESPONDENCE ... 120
THE FORTUNES OF EL- FRIDA ... 101	
OUR COLUMNS FOR THE CURIOUS ... 104	
ZILLAN THE GIPSY; OR, LOVE'S CAPTIVE ... 105	BRIDGED BY HIS LOVE commenced in ... 900
LOVE'S FIERY TRIAL (COMPLETE) ... 109	
BRIDGED BY HIS LOVE ... 114	THE FORTUNES OF EL- FRIDA commenced in ... 904
PACETTE ... 115	
AT CASTLE-PAIX ... 116	ZILLAN THE GIPSY; OR, LOVE'S CAPTIVE, commenced in ... 908
LICKED VICTUALERS AND LICKERS ... 119	
FOREY ... 119	VERA'S VENTURE com- menced in ... 915
HOUSEHOLD TREAS- URES ... 119	
STATISTICS ... 119	

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

OUR CORRESPONDENTS are informed that no charge is made under any circumstances for advertisements appearing on this page.

W. H.—Cranberries will keep all the winter in a firkin of water in a cellar.

G. G.—The electric light is more wholesome than gas, because it does not consume atmosphere nor exude poisonous odours.

S. R. J.—The common house fly lives one day in the egg state, from five days to a week as a maggot, from 10 to 14 days in the month of August before the winged adult period. Most of the flies which are born in August live for a month or six weeks, and die at the coming of frost either of cold or from the attacks of fungoid plants. A few winter over and survive until midsummer, thus maintaining the existence of the species.

W. R.—Griffiths's Valuation, which is so much referred to in Irish news just now, was a valuation of land in Ireland made in the year 1855, by a civil engineer named Griffiths, under instruction of Government. The valuation took many years to complete, and before it was finished the letting value of land had risen greatly. In 1854 Mr. Griffiths estimated that his valuation of Limerick was by that time 25 per cent. under its real value. The Irish tenants who are claiming to pay rent according to Griffiths's valuation would not like to be paid for their butter and beef according to the rates current half a century ago.

S. N. S.—Remove ink-stains from carpets with milk, and afterward wash with fine soap, a clean brush, and warm water. For grease spots use powdered magnesia, or fuller's earth. Sprinkle on the spot, and let lie until the grease is absorbed; renew the earth or magnesia until all the grease is removed. Time and patience will in this way remove the worst of grease spots.

B. N.—Red ants may be banished from a pantry or store-room by strewing the shelves with a small quantity of cloves, either whole or ground. We prefer the former, as not being so likely to get into the food placed upon the shelves. The cloves should be renewed occasionally, as after a time they lose their strength and efficacy.

A. G.—To remove corns: Paste about three sheets or more of cartridge paper together, according to the size of the corn; cut a hole in the centre and lay it over the corn, so as the latter may be seen. This guard will prevent all pressure from the boot and stocking, and in time the corn will grow out and disappear.

A. R.—In public the etiquette is for the lady to recognise a gentleman acquaintance whom she may chance to meet. Should she not do so, she intimates to him that she does not wish to be spoken to or accosted.

R. W. G.—The following is said to be an excellent mode for washing crewels. Put bran in a basin with warm water, and leave the work in it to soak; press occasionally with the hands, but do not rub it. If very much soiled, put it into a second bran water; hang out to dry without wringing it; when nearly dry, stretch on a board with drawing pins, and let it remain until quite dry.

G. G.—There are so many articles that would be appropriate to give a young lady for a birthday present that one need hardly be at a loss to select something that would please the most fastidious. A book of poems, by some of the popular poets, an autograph album, a work-box, with a music-box in the bottom, or a box of gloves, &c.

E. W.—If you have a good natural colour be thankful for it, and use no means to lessen it.

B. S.—Annie signifies "grace, good will."

E. B.—Use oatmeal and warm water to wash your face with instead of soap.

FASTIDIOUS.—There is an effusions and agreeable preparation of iron manufactured by William T. Cooper, of 25, Oxford Street, London, which may be taken without blackening the teeth and is called Phosphate of Iron Effervescent Lozenges—sold, we believe, by most chemists.

NO SIGNATURE.—The book you inquire about is a most useful and instructive little work by W. J. E. Crane, entitled "Artistic Homes; or, How to Furnish with Taste," published at one shilling by Ward and Lock, Salisbury Square, London, E. C.

FAITHFUL LOO and NELLY, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen in the Royal Navy. Faithful Loo is tall, fair, fond of home. Nelly is tall, dark, of a loving disposition. Respondents must be between twenty and twenty-four, tall, dark.

KATE and ALICE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Kate is seventeen, medium height, fair, hazel eyes, fond of children, domesticated. Alice is twenty, medium height, dark, hazel eyes, fond of music and singing. Respondents must be tall, dark, good-looking.

SALLY NELL, twenty, medium height, dark, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a seaman in the Royal Navy. Respondent must be about twenty-four or twenty-six.

MARIA and JENNY, two friends, would like to correspond with two mechanics with a view to matrimony. Maria is twenty-two, medium height, dark hair and eyes, good-looking, fond of singing and dancing. Jenny is twenty, medium height, fair, light hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of children. Respondents must be twenty-two and twenty-three, tall, dark.

ARION and ORION, belonging to the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies between seventeen and twenty. Arion is twenty-one, light hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of music and dancing. Orion is twenty-two, light hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition.

PEARL M., twenty, dark, good-looking, fond of home, would like to correspond with a young man about the same age, fair, good-looking.

THE OLD STONE MILL.

I LOOK through the mist of the gathered years,
To the mill which my childhood knew;
In the whir of whose ceaseless hum and roar
My youth into manhood grew.
The eaves are rotted and dropping down,
And the moss grows over the door,
And its drowsy song has been silent long,
For the grist that will come no more.

'Tis many years since last I saw
The great black-wheel go round,
And its dripping floats slow rise and fall,
With their dull and splashing sound;
Yet the stream to-day still runs away,
And it brings no good nor ill,
For its tides may ebb, or its tides may flow,
It matters not much to the mill.

'Twas there I wrought in honest toil,
Above the bubbling water,
'Twas there I strove with faltering heart,
And won the miller's daughter;
We laid her to-day by the side of the mill,
'Tis where she wished to be,
And the years may come, and the years may go,
But she'll come no more to me.

The mill and I are wrecks of time,
Fast falling to decay,
Its crumbling stones are green with mould,
And I am bent and grey;
We've served the world for many years,
How well it knoweth best,
And soon the mill will totter down,
And I be laid to rest.

H. N. F.

SNAP CAP, JAG and EIGHT PROTECTOR, three non-commissioned officers in the Royal Marines, would like to correspond with three young ladies with a view to matrimony. Snap Cap is twenty-one, tall, dark hair, blue eyes, fond of home and music. Jag is twenty-two, tall, dark hair, hazel eyes, fond of home. Eight Protector is twenty, tall, light hair, blue eyes, fond of home and children.

A. J., nineteen, dark, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young lady about the same age, dark, of a loving disposition.

VOLUNTEER ARTILLERYMAN, a mechanic, thirty-two, wishing to go to America or one of the colonies, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony.

CARNATION and PINK ROSEBUD, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen in the Royal Navy. Carnation is twenty-three, dark, good-looking, fond of home and children. Pink Rosebud is eighteen, medium height, dark, good-looking, fond of home and children. Respondents must be tall, good-looking, fond of home and dancing.

CURLY CHARLIE, twenty-three, tall, would like to correspond with a young lady. Respondents must be twenty-one, tall, fair, of a loving disposition.

HARRY and CHARLIE, two staff non-commissioned officers in the army, would like to correspond with two young ladies. Harry is twenty-three, tall, dark, fond of dancing. Charlie is twenty-nine, medium height, fair, fond of home.

SALLY MILLY, eighteen, medium height, dark, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young gentleman. Respondent must be about twenty-five, tall, dark, handsome, of a loving disposition.

TINY and GEORGIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Tiny is twenty-two, dark, grey eyes, good-looking. Georgie is nineteen, fair, medium height, fond of home and music.

F. V. R., T. B. and T. F., three tradesmen, would like to correspond with three young ladies. F. V. R. is dark, medium height, fond of home and children. T. B. is fair, medium height, of a loving disposition. T. F. is tall, fond of home and music. Respondents must be between eighteen and twenty, good-looking, fond of home.

WILLIAM B., eighteen, medium height, dark hair and eyes, would like to correspond with a young lady.

LILY OF THE VALLEY and ROSE OF DENMARK, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Lily of the Valley is fair, good-looking. Rose of Denmark is seventeen, dark, handsome, fond of music and dancing. Respondents must be tall, dark.

ROYAL TRUCK and KEEL, two seamen in the Merchant Service, would like to correspond with two young ladies. Royal Truck is twenty, tall, good-looking, blue eyes, of a loving disposition. Keel is twenty, short, blue eyes, good-looking, fond of music and dancing.

MURIEL and IOLANDE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. Muriel is seventeen, tall, fair, good-looking, fond of music and dancing. Iolande is eighteen, medium height, dark, good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of dancing.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

THISTLE is responded to by—Sailor Jack, twenty, good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children.

W. H. by—Rose, eighteen, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children.

WILLIE by—Kate, nineteen, medium height, dark hair, blue eyes.

F. W. by—A. J., seventeen, tall, dark, hazel eyes, good-looking.

HANDSOME LEONARD by—A. V. G., twenty, medium height, brown hair and eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children.

LOVELY JOSEPH by—Evelyn, eighteen, medium height, brown hair, good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of home.

HANDSOME LEONARD by—Rose, twenty, tall, dark, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children.

J. W. D. by—Anemone.

JACK by—Annie, fair, good-looking, fond of home.

WALTER by—Alice, tall, good-looking, hazel eyes.

WILLIE by—Emma, fair, blue eyes, fond of children.

WEST HO by—Dolly, tall, dark.

TIN DISK by—Jessie, twenty, tall, fair, good-looking.

DIRT BARGE by—Clara, eighteen, tall, dark, good-looking.

W. H. by—A. R.

C. F. R. H. by—R. L.

BESS by—A. A. E., tall, fair, good-looking.

NELL by—R. J., medium height, blue eyes, fond of home and children.

WALTER by—Whimsical Queen, tall, fond of home.

CONSTANCE by—Tom C. B., twenty-five, brown hair and eyes, loving.

ROSE by—Tom Bowline, twenty-five, tall, dark.

SHAMROCK by—Sky Sail Jack, twenty-four, medium height, fond of home.

THISTLE by—Sam Basco, twenty-three, medium height, fair.

SOU by—Springheeled Jack, twenty, tall, fair, of a loving disposition, fond of music.

ROSE by—Tom Howling, twenty-three, tall, fair, fond of home and children.

MATILDA by—Portsmouth Joe.

ALMA by—Handsome Harry.

SARAH by—Wealthy Widow, forty.

GIPSY by—W. L. P., twenty-one, tall.

DICK by—M. A. F., twenty-five, tall, brown hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition.

RUBY by—Tom B., twenty-one, tall, dark.

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